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A Refutation of Official History: A truthful reconstruction of the political trajectory of Nigeria (1960-1985)*

I.

Introduction

In organizing this essay I have been guided, in part, by expressed expectations of several compatriots. In a paper, **Proletarian struggles in Nigeria: Historical Highlights** (1983), Comrade Ola Oni lamented: "Today we do not have a broad account of the struggle of the masses for freedom". He then advised: "Of course, the responsibility lies with the revolutionary historians. Such account must pay attention to how the struggles were organized, the role of the revolutionary leadership in the organization and the formulation of the strategy and tactics of those who took side with the revolutionary movement, the occasions of revolutionary success or defeats.... The purpose of history is to guide the present in learning from the past so that revolutionary activities can be better organized and directed".

** This essay originally appeared under the title "A refutation of official history" as a 10-part column in Nigeria's **The Guardian** between November and December 1990.*

What follows is, a response to Ola Oni's challenge. It is an attempt to truthfully reconstruct the history of Nigeria - from the early days of colonialism to 1985. This truthful reconstruction is at the same time a confrontation with, and refutation of, what I call **Official History**.

Official History, of State-House History, is that version of historical account and interpretation which reflects the positions and interest of Nigeria's ruling bloc or its hegemonic faction in the interclass, intra-class and national struggles which form the content of Nigeria's history, or any national history for that matter. The ruling bloc is constituted by capitalists, feudalists, representatives of trans-national companies, commission agents, leaders of the Civil Service and the Armed Forces. The hegemonic faction of this bloc has, since Nigeria was effectively united about 1950, been constituted by the Northern faction - what some radical writers in Nigeria have called the **Northern Oligarchy**.

The high points of Nigeria's history which "Official Historians" have distorted and which this book tries to reconstruct include the pre-independence national struggle to define an agenda for post-colonial-Nigeria; the crisis of the First Republic (1960-1966) and civil war (1967-1970); and the post-civil war military intervention led by Generals Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo and Theophilus Danjuma.

The struggles continued with the political bottle preceding the establishment of the Second Republic (1979-1983) and the crisis that wrecked that Republic; the December 1983 military coup led by Generals Muhammadu Buhari, Domkat Bali, Ibrahim Babangida, Tunde Idiagbon and Sani Abacha; and the long, turbulent and fruitless transition under General Babangida (1985 - 1993).

Official History in Nigeria is history from the point of view of victors in national struggles. Unfortunately, but not necessarily, the "victors' history" has been a sequence of distortions. Since independence the victors have been the same. Indeed the faction of the Nigerian Armed Forces which came to power in the coup of July 1966 has been in power ever since - broken only by Shehu Shagari four-year civilian rule (1979-1983). That faction produced Generals Mohammed, Buhari, Babangida and

now Sani Abacha (November 1993). The book tries to refute the "victors' version" of the Nigerian history by unveiling falsehoods and distortions.

Our method of approach led to this discovery, namely, that the main feature of the Nigerian history is that it is a simultaneous process of making and unmaking: While some social forces have been making and building the country, others have been unmaking and dismantling *it*. The irony of this continuous historical process is that the leading force in the ranks of those unmaking and dismantling the nation is constituted by the ruling class, and its hegemonic faction, its state and its successive governments.- Conversely, the leading social force engaged in the act of making and building Nigeria has almost continuously been located outside Nigeria's ruling class and its hegemonic faction. The latter are the unmakers of Nigeria. The working and toiling people and their organisations, and the movements against ethnic oppression and religious intolerance are, in the main the makers of Nigeria. The process of refuting the unmakers' version of the Nigerian History is simultaneously that of rehabilitating the makers. The true heroes of the country's struggles.

The occasion of Nigeria's 30th (in)dependence anniversary (October 1, 1990) provided another opportunity for nauseating regurgitations of official and officially - inspired history. All sorts of "state-house chroniclers," long thought to have rested their anti-history pens, showed that they were still in the business of evasion, distortion and reversal of historical roles. But what was most painful and tragic in this fraudulent celebration was that descent people who attempted to deviate from official history and truthfully reconstruct historical episodes and events also ended up with timid evasions and unhelpful generalisations. It was as if these otherwise honest people were writing under the spell of bourgeois intellectualism, as if they were afraid to challenge official accounts of historical events as sanctioned by the hegemonic factions of the ruling class.

It is tragic, for instance, that while bourgeois and petit-bourgeois writers have given definite accounts of and passed judgements on Nzeogwu coup, the civil war, Murtala Muhammed and Orkar's attempted coup, radical writers have either remained silent or "radicalised" bourgeois accounts, prejudices and judgements, but retaining their main trends and thrusts. But then real life has shown that bourgeois and petit-bourgeois

monopolization of history-writing (including the writing of the history of radical movements!) is a powerful weapon in the hands of the ruling class.

Monopolisation of history-writing is one of the staying powers of the enemies of the people, those who exploit; oppress and divide the working and toiling people: those who exploit, oppress and divide the working and toiling people, those who keep our country and our people down. That power has to be removed. Only a positive refutation of official history can begin to do this. And by "positive refutation" I mean the unveiling of falsehoods and distortions, plus a reconstruction. I intend to make a contribution to this effort in the series of **articles starting** today.

As earlier stated, the main feature of Nigerian history, truthfully observed and researched, is that it is a simultaneous process of making and unmaking. In other words, while certain social forces have been making and building the country, others have been unmaking and dismantling it. The irony of this continuous historical process which is also its main feature - is that the leading forces in the ranks of those unmaking and dismantling the nation are the ruling classes, the state and its successive governments. Conversely, the leading social forces engaged in the act of building and making Nigeria have almost continuously been located outside the ailing class, its state and its successive governments.

The historic process of making/unmaking started with a *fait accompli*: The conquest of the various communities now constituting the territories of Nigeria, the formal proclamation of Nigeria and the so-called pacification of the conquered people to accept *the fait accompli*. The process of making and unmaking has continued through and beyond the colonial era, through the first civilian republic, through crisis and civil war, through the first and second military republic, through the second civilian republic, through the *ihhd* military republic, to the present (fourth) military republic. Six periods-to be covered in ten articles are therefore delineated.

Focusing on the making/unmaking theme, I can see only two ways of preparing these articles. It is either I attempt to summarise, in a chronological way, the one-hundred -year history of Nigeria or I build the narrative around historical landmarks. In have chosen the latter. And this method presents us with the year 1861 when the port of Lagos was colonised by

Britain between that year and 1900 the whole area now constituting the Federal Republic of Nigeria was conquered and occupied.

On January 1, 1900, the "Protectorate" of Southern Nigeria, the "Protectorate" of Northern Nigeria and the colony and "Protectorate" of Lagos were proclaimed as separate colonial territories. Thereafter they were administered, also as separate territories, until 1906 when Lagos was merged with the "Protectorate" of Southern Nigeria. In 1914 the Southern "Protectorate" and Northern "Protectorate" were merged to form the Colony and Protectorate" of Nigeria.

Three historical facts should never be forgotten in the search for the origin of the national question and the so-called North-South dichotomy in Nigeria. It is definitely not enough to blame this serious problem on colonial intrigue - a shift of focus which tends to absolve the native successors to the colonial throne. The three facts are as follows: First: that the Northern and Southern parts of the country came into existence as two separate colonies and "Protectorates" before the country came into being as a colony, and not the other way round. The former came into being in 1900; the latter was not born until 14 years later, in 1914. To put this important point differently; Nigeria was not created first and then divided into unequal parts later. On the contrary, two unequal, but separate colonies were merged to become one colony.

In the second place the compositions and administrative structures of the two colonies (North and South) were dictated, at least initially, solely by military and economic needs of British colonialism, and not by the desire to create political problems for the future Nigerian nation. Indeed colonialism's military and economic needs dictated the choice of Asaba, Calabar, Jebba, Lokoja and Zungeru for the roles assigned to them between 1900 and 1914.

In the third place, it was the regionalist political leaders - Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe - rather than the British colonial masters that refused to agree to the resolution of the question of state-creation at the resumed constitutional conferences in 1957 and 1958. Had any two of the leaders unconditionally and unambiguously supported the creation of more states this would have been done before independence. In the event the British Government appointed a commission, in 1957, to

inquire into the fears of the minorities and how to remove them. The commission rejected the demand for the creation of more states and the report was hailed by the NCNC and NPC but rejected by the AG and minority movements, and the country became (in) dependent under the full weight of the nationality problem.

The origin of the national question over which the bourgeoisie still threatens to tear Nigeria apart can therefore be correctly articulated. British colonialism brought together two of the colonial territories without doing much to weld them into one nation and one people before their withdrawal in 1960. Nigeria's militant nationalists, having committed themselves to the political unification of the African continent were, *ipso facto*, committed to the unity of Nigeria. But the Macpherson Constitution of 1954 fashioned by the British in conjunction with the emergent bourgeois leaders-stamped regionalism as the mode of existence of the Nigerian polity.

It is of historical importance that Nigeria's militant nationalists, concentrated mainly in the Zikist Movement, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the National Church of Nigeria - all allied to the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NUNC) -and the Northern Elements Progressive Association (NEPA) advocated a unitary form of government with several states. The formation of the NCNC was itself initiated in 1944 by students and youths still in their teens and early twenties. The 'elders' who later betrayed the movement were invited later.

II.

The bourgeois leaders - or the so-called constitutional leaders - have never, in reality, accepted the concept of one Nigeria. For their commitment to capitalist development together with its logic of competition compels them to struggle for the creation of regional spheres of control and to pay mere lip service to one Nigeria. Even when a bourgeois faction fought to defeat Biafra's secession (1967-70) it was not engaged in a struggle to unite the country on a truly humane, patriotic, democratic or egalitarian basis. On the contrary, the federal bourgeois faction was engaged merely in a struggle to recreate Nigeria under its own hegemony. Similarly, the Biafran military and bourgeois civilian leadership, callously exploiting the people's anguish,

genuine fears and justifiable anger, were engaged essentially in a struggle to carve out an area of exclusive control having lost their own share of Nigeria's 'national cake.'

This explains why the national question - the question of national unity and ethnic equality - has remained as acute as it was before the breakdown of the first civilian republic' in January 1966, the creation of 21 states from the original three region notwithstanding. The country is still divided into three regions. shall return to this.

The history of anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria is simultaneously the history of the betrayal of militant nationalism by the bourgeois constitutional leaders. The NCNC at its height in 1947 was a militantly anti-imperialist mass movement, embracing 183 organisations - including the youth movement, the student's movement, the labour movement, the women's movement and several cultural organisations. But from 1948 when the British Government gave the indication that it was prepared to grant independence to "responsible" leaders entrenched in each of the three regions, the NCNC started to force out its militantly anti-imperialist components.

As the regionalist constitution was being put in place, regionally based constitutional parties started to emerge. By the end of 1951, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), based in the Northern Region and the Action Group, based in the Western Region, emerged. Simultaneously, the NCNC was pushed from its national and anti-imperialist status to that of a bourgeois pro-imperialist status. With time it also became a regional party in essence.

Between 1951 and 1960 the three main constitutional political parties - the NPC, the NCNC and the AG - were united only in their efforts to defeat militant nationalism. In this effort they found a willing ally in British colonialism which had been thoroughly shaken by several mass uprisings of workers, youths, students, peasants and women between 1945 and 1951. Thus neither the NCNC leadership nor the other 'constitutional leaders' raised a finger when the Zikist Movement- which was the motor of NCNC's militancy - was proscribed in 1950 and its youthful leaders, including Raji Abdallah, Osita Agwuna, Anthony Enahoro, Mokuwugo Okoye, Oged Macaulay and Ikenna Nzimiro, were sent to jail.

The constitutional leaders negotiated power and obtained self-government and then (in) dependence "on a platter of gold" (Azikiwe). Although they were firmly united against militant anti-imperialists, they were badly divided among themselves and alienated from the

minority nationalities. But before long the militants were to regain their strength and the constitutional leaders were to fall apart under the pressure of militants and the weight of the problems they had evaded in order to become regional leaders of (in) dependent Nigeria.

In 1960, most of the Nigerian Left re-organised under the Nigerian Youth Congress (NYC). The National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) whose formation was accelerated in 1956 by students' opposition to the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Nigeria also became radicalised. Soon after, a new central labour organisation, the Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and several left - wing political parties also came into being. Between the year of independence and the collapse of the First Civilian Republic on January 15, 1966, the pressure mounted on the new ruling class.

The highlights of radical struggles in this period include the struggle against the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact the demonstration against the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the protest against the Preventive Detention Bill, the struggle against the American Peace Corps in Nigeria and the general strike of 1964. A radical left-wing party, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) was formed in 1962 under the leadership of Gogo Chu Nzeribe and P.A. Curtis Joseph, in 1963, the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP) which had been formed in 1960 under the leadership of Tunji Otegbeye, Wahab Goodluck and Eskor Toyo, announced its existence. And during the 1964 general strike the Labour Party came into being under the leadership of the hero of the 1945 strike, Michael Imoudu, and Eskor Toyo.

Under the pressure of the Nigerian masses the bourgeois leaders lost their pro-imperialist, anti-militant, and traitorous pre-independence unity. The alliance between the NCNC and NPC which had formed the independence government at the federal level in 1959 broke down. The parties fell out among themselves after successfully decimating the AG and removing it from power in the Western Region in 1962.

As Obafemi Awolowo and his lieutenants languished in jail -having been convicted of treasonable felony in 1963 - the NPC and NCNC which were in control of Northern Region and Eastern Region respectively - waged bitter struggles over the national census figures. The federal partners also fought to supplant the AG as the government of the Western Region. The NCNC managed to get the Mid-Western Region carved out of the Western Region.

It assumed the governance of the new legion, but simultaneously lost the control of Western Region to Akintola's NNDP, an ally of the NPC, and one of the most unpopular government parties in Nigeria's history.

"Then came federal elections of December 1964 followed by the Western Regional elections of October 1965. Both were conducted in widespread violence and, as expected the results were fiercely disputed. The 1964 elections produced a constitutional stalemate which almost produced a military coup d'etat. Somehow the bourgeois leaders retreated and were reprieved from chaos" (*Vickers and Post*).

The bourgeois leaders men organised a "national government" at the centre. But the 1965 Western Regional election which was the most rigged election in Africa led to a coup d'etat The coup was the culmination of a two month popular uprising in the Western Region in which the radical left, divided as it was, played a leading part. Tunji Otegbeye., who was detained even before the coup, is a living witness.

In recording the coup of January 15, 1966, official historians and state-house chroniclers conveniently miss out three facts. First, that the coup was preceded by a popular uprising; second, that the proclamation of Major Nzeogwu in Kaduna echoed the openly declared position of Nigeria's radical patriotism; and third, that there were in fact two coups - one progressive and patriotic (Nzeogwu) and the other reactionary (Ironsi). I shall take off from here in the next instalment.

III.

In the morning of Saturday, January 15, 1966, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, a 28-year old major in the Nigerian Army, a chief instructor in Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) in Kaduna, made this proclamation over Kaduna Radio:

"In the name of the Supreme Council of the Revolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces, I declare martial law over the Northern provinces of Nigeria. The constitution is suspended and the regional government and elected assemblies are hereby dissolved... The aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a strong, united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife. Our method of achieving this is strictly military but we

have no doubt that every Nigerian will give us maximum cooperation by assisting the regime and not disturbing the peace during the slight changes that are taking place.

"All treaty obligations previously entered into with any foreign nation will be respected, and we hope that such nations will respect our country's integrity and will avoid taking sides with enemies of the revolution and enemies of the people... You will hear and probably see a lot being done by certain bodies charged by the Supreme Council with the duties of national integration, supreme justice, general security and property recovery... You are hereby warned that looting, arson, homosexuality, rape, embezzlement, bribery or corruption, obstructing of the revolution, sabotage, subversion, false alarms and assistance to foreign invaders, are all offences punishable by death sentence.

"Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten per cent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles; those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds. Like good soldiers we are not promising anything miraculous or spectacular. But what we do promise every law-abiding citizen is freedom from fear and all forms of oppression, freedom from general inefficiency and freedom to live and strive in every field of human endeavour, both nationally and internationally, we promise that you will no more be ashamed to say that you are Nigerians".

The long excerpts are necessary in order to bring out the key elements of that historic proclamation and as a contribution both to the refutation of the official history of that uprising, and a critique of the Nigerian leftists and radical patriots for failing to recognise the character of that event. It is first necessary to state that Major Nzeogwu was the leader of the uprising and not Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna as claimed by Emeka Ojukwu. Nzeogwu remained in Kaduna not because that was his station but because the Supreme Council of the revolution considered Kaduna the decisive centre of battle.

The Nzeogwu-led coup was a complete success in Kaduna and in other northern cities, except Kano where the 5th Battalion commanded by Colonel Emeka Odumegwu

Ojukwu was stationed. But the coup was a complete failure in Lagos and other southern cities. After three days of holding out Nzeogwu surrendered to General Ironsi, the Head of the Army, who had in the meantime taken over power in Lagos after arresting the rebels. Nzeogwu surrendered under the pressure of his "friends", including Colonel Conrad Nwawo, Major Olusegun Obasanjo and Major Alexander Madiebo. He was escorted to Lagos by Colonel Nwawo. The argument of the friends" was that if Nzeogwu continued his resistance to Army Headquarters in Lagos both the army and the country would be divided and a bloody civil war would ensue. Nzeogwu did not want a civil war - although ironically he was to die 18 months later in a civil war whose cause (secession) he had opposed in speeches, interviews and written communications.

Before his surrender and his subsequent journey to Lagos, Nzeowu had reached an agreement with Ironsi, through his "friends" that the people who had been removed from power would not be returned to power and that he and his compatriots would be given a "safe conduct" (Ruth First). But the agreement was never kept, neither did his "friends" through whom he negotiated its demand that the agreement be kept. In fact, as Nzeogwu and his compatriots languished in detention, his friends, by their opportunistic and fanatical support, were urging Ironsi to negate the import of the first coup and by implication return the country to the tribalism, nepotism and arbitrariness of the past.

The pressure mounted by Nzeogwu's traitorous and reactionary friends became effective only because the uprising collapsed militarily, A number of reasons were responsible for this. In the first place, the rebels, having lost Lagos, could only continue the struggle through a confrontation with the armed usurpers down south. The prospects for victory in this were bleak as the loyalty of Nzeogwu's troops was beginning to wane (Kirk-Greene). In the second place, Colonel Ojukwu neither supported nor opposed the coup; He merely wanted power for himself, using the Kano-based Fifth Battalion which he commanded. He put the troops on alert and arrested the army officer sent from Kaduna by Nzeogwu to collect money from the Kano branch of the Central bank. Nzeogwu had needed the money to pay his troops' salaries.

In the third place, although the masses welcomed the army majors' coup, there was no organised or sustained demonstration of support. The young army officers having initially banned "demonstrations and unauthorized assembly" made frantic contacts

with labour and left-wing leaders and asked for public demonstration. But the leaders had not only been badly divided and thoroughly weakened by the internal strife of the preceding two years, they were also buried then, as now, in abstract revolutionism. They preached revolution, taught the youths revolution, advocated revolution, but could not recognise revolution" when it erupted - perhaps because it failed to correspond to the texts. They were therefore neither inclined, nor in the position, to organise any public support.

After three days dual power -one in Lagos, the other in Kaduna - political authority finally passed to General Aguiyi-Ironsi in Lagos. Thus, the young group that initiated a radical military uprising lost power to a military regime that, with time, showed that it suffered - at a higher temperature - all the afflictions that killed its civilian predecessor, namely, tribalism, corruption, insensitivity, exploitation and denials of fundamental human rights, Ironsi's regime was, therefore, doomed from the very beginning, for it was not a solution to the problems that enthroned violence in Nigeria, created the political impasse of the previous two years, sparked off the 1964 General Strike and brought the masses to the street from October 1964 to January 14, 1966.

IV.

Ironsi's victory was not just a defeat for a revolution and a return to the status-quo. His victory became a powerful weapon 'in the hands of those who sought to discredit the Nzeogwu-led revolution. For not only was Ironsi's counter-coup reconstructed as a continuation of Nzeogwu's coup, it was also linked to the alleged armed conspiracy of January 1965 (said to be led by Ojukwu) and the political and ethnic struggles that preceded the coup.

The domination of the conspiratorial group by officers of the Igbo ethnic group could have been explained through an examination of the ethnic divisions and political persuasion in the officer corp of the pre-1966 Nigerian Army and the pre-coup relationships between the officers who attempted the coup. But Ironsi's reactionary counter-coup made this explanation impossible, in the event, rumours took the place of sociology of military coups.

In the second place the ethnic distribution of the casualty figures (predominantly from the North and the West) and the fact that virtually no military action took place in Eastern and Mid-Western Regions - where the NCNC, led by two Ibo-speaking premiers, was in power-fitted the "Ibo conspiracy theory in the absence of a credible and authentic refutation and explanation. And only the revolutionary majors could have provided this. But they were incarcerated. It was in order to fill this gap that I sought and obtained« an interview with a retired Nigerian Army officer who was Nzeogwu's subordinate at the Kaduna Military College during the coup.

In the interview the major, who was a Biafran field commander in the 1967-70 civil war, explained to me that the January revolutionaries concentrated their operations in Kaduna and Lagos because these were the centres of Nigeria's political and military power. It was from these centres, according to him, that real resistance to the military uprising could emanate. On the ethnic composition of the casualty figures, he admitted that the escape of some key targets, such as General Ironsi, was perhaps due to ethnic considerations. But he insisted that such considerations could have come not from the Supreme Council of the Revolution or from the five majors, but from junior officers assigned to do particular jobs. He said that the coup leaders could not have considered an "equitable distribution" of casualty figures. The coup leaders went after only strategic political and military personnel.

The Nzeogwu coup - it must never be forgotten - was a coup against a government in which the NPC had a near-absolute control; it was preceded by a mass uprising organised and led by direct opponents of the NPC namely, the AG, NCNC alliance (UPGA). It was a coup informed ideologically, in the first instance, by the radical left, and in the second instance by UPGA. The uprising must be assessed and judged on those grounds.

The accounts of the Nzeogwu-led coup, later given by some of its leading participants unwittingly lent support to the theory of "Ibo conspiracy". Wale Ademoyega and Ben Gbulie, in their books *Why We Struck and The Five Majors*, admitted that tribalism and ethnic consciousness were strong in the Armed Forces of the First Republic. But they implicitly denied that ethnic consciousness was present in the ranks of the revolutionary soldiers and might have influenced the actions and inactions of some of them.

Ademoyega and Gbulie made the mistake of assuming that the admission of the possibility of ethnic influence would be fatal to their insistence that the uprising was a patriotic and nationalistic one. On the contrary, it was their implicit denials that lent support to the charge of "Ibo conspiracy," Revolutionaries are not angels carriers, but to a lesser degree, of the contradictions of the Nigerian society which produced them. It was their publicly declared patriotic mission that justified their action historically.

History has repeatedly shown that revolutionaries are not infallible, and need not be. Every revolutionary formation which sets out to champion the cause of the oppressed masses must be ready to publicly point out its weaknesses. It must be prepared to admit its mistakes. If it fails to do so, and rather pretends to be angelic, then its credibility and hence moral authority, will be in jeopardy. For, in that case, the revolutionaries will be confronted with the empirical evidence of these weaknesses and mistakes. The January boys made costly mistakes. But then they did not have the opportunity to admit and perhaps correct or assuage them - early enough to prevent the tragedy that followed.

To conclude: Revolutionary consciousness and purity develop in the course of struggle. They are never given ready-made. Preparedness to admit mistakes is a moral and political principle for revolutionaries. Oppressors do not possess it.

The list of casualties of the Nzeogwu-led military uprising almost suggest an ethnic-based plan of execution. The list of the leaders of the uprising also suggests an ethnic-based plan. If this was not the plan or orientation of some of the leaders of the uprising, then it is not enough to say so. They must not only admit that the execution suggests an ethnic-based plan, they must also strive to investigate, analyse and explain why it happened - if not for ethnic reasons - that the ranks of the revolutionaries within the Armed Forces were dominated by officers from the Ibo ethnic group. Gbulie must explain why he and Ademoyega seemed to condemn Northern political leaders in strong terms while almost eulogizing southern leaders, except Akintola.

The nationalist, patriotic and class-based intentions of some of the leaders of the Nzeogwu-led uprising are not in doubt. But the historical accounts of Gbulie and Ademoyega are exposed to general and powerful refutations because they fail to admit the weaknesses and mistakes of the "revolutionary" formations. It is not enough to plead that

Ironsi, Madiebo and Ojukwu betrayed, hijacked and crushed the revolution. Why they were able to do so - politically and militarily - must also be thoroughly explained.

Precisely because Gbulie and Ademoyega failed to admit the weaknesses and mistakes of their group Mainasara, in his book *Why They Struck*, was able to use the list of casualties and the Nigerian Police (Special Branch) report to "prove" the following diesis: "Redemption of the Country was not their aim. Their purpose was to prevent a section of the country, the North, from effective participation in the governance of the country...."

Going by the errors and accidents in the operation, the political antecedents to the coup, Ironsi's arbitrary measures and several after-coup provocations, Mainasara's opinion seems tenable as a working hypothesis. But my own research into this matter convinces me that he and those with similar opinions are wrong: The Nzeogwu-coup was not an Igbo coup. It was a revolutionary intervention. But it failed.

V.

The collapse of Nzeogwu's revolution essentially brought back the First Republic together with its contradictions, opportunistic alliances, arbitrariness, tribalism, oppression, insensitivity, corruption, nepotism, incompetence and mediocrity, all the maladies that Nzeogwu denounced. The appointment of conservative and pompous military governors to administer then-respective regions of origin completed the proof of the basic character of Ironsi's reaction. The Decree 34 of May 1966 purporting to dissolve the federation was as self-serving and idiotic as it was arbitrary.. It was a mockery of the Nigerian patriots' selfless struggle for genuine national unity. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) shortly before the outbreak of civil war in 1967 Nzeogwu had said that though-the January boys hated and had denounced regionalism, their plan was to retain the Federal system - but carving the country into a number of small states. But General Aguiyi Ironsi, having initially 'awarded' the regions to reactionary officers, now turned round to dissolve the awards. He played directly into the hands of his equally reactionary compatriots who had been spoiling for revenge, and they did not disappoint him. The clearly provocative and insensitive actions of lumpen crowds among 'non-Northerners' living in the North merely added a new weapon in the hands of revenge seekers and Igbo conspiracy theoreticians.

The carefully-planned riots which followed Decree 34 and the attempts to contain them and assuage the feelings of the aggrieved were mere repeats of bourgeois arbitrariness and half-hearted compromises for which the governance*of the First Republic was noted. A military confrontation along ethnic lines was inevitable although the outcome could not be predicted. The slaughtering of the immensely popular leaders of the January coup whom Aguiyi had refused to release or put on trial was also expected in the event of Ironsi's defeat in the threatening bourgeoisie ethnic war. Eventually the counter-coup of July 29, 1966 came. From then it was an inevitable descent to chaos secession and war.

The July 1966 coup leaders, under the command of Colonel Murtala Mohammed, moved for Northern secession. But they were stopped by Gowon, assisted by Nigerian civil servants and British and American diplomats. Eventually power passed to Gowon and troops loyal to him, and 'one Nigeria' was preserved.

A great tragedy however befell the left movement in addition to its tragic inability to respond to the young majors' call for public support: The movement, including the various communist parties, split down the middle and each faction lined up behind its own bourgeois patron. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Afro-Asian' Solidarity Organisation (NAASO) was formed with government's assistance' to support Gowon's political and diplomatic efforts. In Biafra, factions of the Nigeria Communist Party and the Nigerian Trade Union Congress-sprang up with Biafran appellations, and supported Ojukwu. Biafra itself became a mere copy of Nigeria.

Cadres of the Nigerian Communist Party from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, having returned from a six - month military-political training in China (September 1965 - March 1966), took up Gowon's offer to infiltrate the Biafra's hold on the Eastern ethnic minorities for whom two states had been created. They did this believing honestly and heroically that it was a revolutionary action, in support of the principle of self-determination for all peoples. But when after the capture of Calabar (September 1967) by federal forces, the communists who had taken an active part in the leadership of the attack and literally taken over the field command at a stage wanted to enlist formally in the Nigerian army they were asked to come in as sergeants. They refused and, as expected, they became targets of harassment throughout the remaining part of the war.

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On May 26, 1967, the Eastern Consultative Assembly and Council of Chiefs and Elders ended a two day meeting at Enugu. It was addressed by the governor, Colonel Emeka Ojukwu. The official communique issued at the end of the meeting spoke of a 'unanimous resolution' requesting, authorising and mandating the governor to declare the Eastern Region the Republic of Biafra. But in a recent interview I conducted with a former nationalist fighter who attended the meeting, no such resolution was ever passed! Those who attended the meeting merely proposed that steps should be taken to ensure the safety of lives in the East. We recall that at the time there were strong rumours that Northern troops were planning to pursue and finish off fleeing Easterners in their homes. The pro-secession faction in the Eastern leadership translated the desire for safety to mean a call for secession. The nationalist fighter who had, before then, gone to jail several times in the struggle for a free, united and socialist Nigeria, also told me that there was no resolution to the effect that 'non-Easterners' resident in the East should leave the East as announced in a communique following an earlier meeting of the Consultative Assembly. He protested against these falsifications and manipulations, but his protests merely intensified the official suspicion, isolation and harassment mounted against him and his compatriots in and out of uniform. It would appear that the 'resolution' on non-Easterners was in preparation for the latter 'resolution' on secession.

The truth - the long tortured truth - must however be told. The demand for the secession of Eastern Region and the declaration of Biafra was a very popular one, in the Igbo-speaking areas. But it was not a popular demand among the minority nationalities. For the wish of Ibo-speaking people living among the minorities (in Port Harcourt, Calabar, Ogoja etc) cannot be taken as the wish of the minorities. The pro-secession demonstrations reported in some of these minority centres cannot be construed to indicate minority support'. That type of statistics is fraudulent.

But then, the Eastern leadership and Ojukwu, in particular, could not have survived - even literally - if secession had not been declared. This predicament was however the result

of their earlier inclination to articulate and formulate 'self-determination' and security' only in terms of secession. In other words the pro-secession leaders including Ojukwu himself, became prisoners of their own creation, The people genuinely needed and wanted safety. But they did not ask for secession until the leaders clothed their popular desire in secession uniform. The people (including students, workers and traders) took over the demand, and the leaders, in turn used this as a proof of people's support for secession, it was a vicious cycle.

VI.

Several key revolutionaries including some nationalist fighters and those January 1966 boys who were imprisoned in Eastern Region were opposed to secession. But their opposition to secession was not a support for Colonel Yakubu Gowon or his concept of One Nigeria. Their line could be summarised: Neither secession nor acceptance of Gowon. This line could also have led to a civil war. But then such a civil war would possess the potential of transforming into a revolutionary and nationally based one: A class war. It would have at a stage, become a continuation and a correction of the January 1966 uprising. But the anti-secession revolutionary leaders were not only in hopeless minority; they were severely restricted and denied access to the vital means of mass communication.

Furthermore, frantic efforts were made by the nationalists and January fighters, even at the eleventh hour, to prevent secession. When secession occurred, they tried to prevent a shooting war. And when a shooting war erupted, they tried to bring it to a quick conclusion through a resumption of the original revolutionary project. Nzeogwu and his colleagues wrote frantic letters to left-wing and radical leaders in Nigeria (Otegbeye, Solarin, etc); Colonels Ifeajuna and Banjo, Major Philip Alale (a brilliant communist and Ojukwu's brother-in-law) and Agbam (a career diplomat) were publicly executed at Enugu for their attempt to remove Ojukwu and re-channel the struggle.

Wole Soyinka ended up in detention for 20 months for attempting to map out a revolutionary third course. He had been betrayed by his pro-Gowon academic colleagues and some of those people who had 20 months earlier betrayed their "friend" Nzeogwu.

Biafra was proclaimed on May 30, 1967. And war broke out on July 6. In June 1969, six months before the collapse of Biaira, Colonel Ojukwu and his supporters rushed back to the communists, radicals and nationalists who were still around and free. He wanted them to help save the situation. An abstract and incoherent manifesto - the Ahiara Declaration - was produced and launched with fanfare. But it was useless as it mobilised, in many cases, it came too late.

Revolutionary forces having been marginalised and silenced, the stage was left open to ethnic and reactionary bourgeois forces on both sides of the divide. They fought out the battle, pushing hundreds of thousands of helpless masses to their graves, dehumanising many more, and making millions of pounds from the arms-trade. When they became tired, some ran away, others signed an armistice, while others were finished off even after the war had been declared ended. One Nigeria was re-established.

The 30-month Civil War ended in January 1970, and this coincided with the oil boom: a sudden sharp rise in the level of production and export of oil from the country. For the victorious Nigerian bourgeoisie and their imperialist allies it was a happy coincidence. On October 1, 1970. General Gowon, now literally swimming in oil and preoccupied with what to do with money, announced his government's nine-point programme to lead the country back to constitutional democracy by 1976.

The programme, arranged in Gowon's own order of priority was as follows: The re-organisation of the armed forces; the implementation of the National Development Plan and the repair of the damage and neglect of the war; the eradication of corruption in Nigeria's national life; the settlement of the question of the creation of more states; the preparation and adoption of a new constitution; the conducting of a new formula for revenue allocation; the conducting of a national population census; the organisation of genuinely national political parties and the organisation of elections in the states and at the centre.

Later that year, the Second National Development Plan (1970 - 74) was published. It promised to transform Nigeria into a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a just and egalitarian society; a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and free and democratic society.

"A just and egalitarian society", declared the Plan, "puts premium on reducing inter-personal incomes and promoting balanced development among the various communities in the different geographical areas in the country, it organises its economic institutions in such a way that there is no oppression based on class, social status, ethnic group or state".

That was Gowon's military manifesto, but more than five years later and in spite of pressures from the people, General Gowon was yet to embark on any of these projects. Between January 1970 when the war ended and July 1975 when he was overthrown, Gowon mounted an intolerant, repressive and arrogant rule in Nigeria. He and his state governors became military dictators, resorting to canes in schools and work-places, shaving of heads, shooting of students and incarceration of critics. Order had to be restored to a population that had imbibed the indiscipline of war situation! That was his own form of gratitude to the working and toiling people on both sides of the line for making monumental sacrifices during the Civil War.

But Gowon's fascism was adequately met by a new generation of militants that had grown since the war years. Since Gowon had, in 1974, cancelled his plan to return the country to civil rule, it was a discredited and bankrupt military government committed to an indefinite period of rule that the Mohammed-Obasanjo rebellion removed in July 1975.

On July 29, 1975, exactly nine years after the violent overthrow of General Ironsi's regime by a group of young army officers, the same group of officers organised a coup d'etat against General Gowon. It is necessary for an understanding of the trajectory of Nigeria's political history, to recall that this group of officers led by Murtaia Mohammed had, after the elimination of Ironsi, initiated the secession of the Northern Region from the rest of the country. The joint intervention of army officers from the minority ethnic groups in the North together with senior federal civil servants and American and British embassy officials simultaneously prevented them from executing the project of secession and brought Yakubu Gowon to power. Later, as a federal field commander in the civil war, Murtala Mohammed became so controversial that he had to be relieved of his command by Gowon. In terms of brutality, he was comparable to Colonel Benjamin Adekunle of the Nigerian Army and Colonel Hannibal Achuzie of the Biafran Army.

By July 1975, however, Murtala Muhammed had become a changed man, having in the words of Anthony Kirk-Greece and Douglas Rimer, quickly overcome "any superficial handicap imposed by his ruthless wartime reputation in a country 'necessarily dedicated to reconciliation and reintegration and committed to a crisp, brisk programme of action' (Nigeria since 1970). For the third time in a decade Muhammed confronted Gowon, but this time successfully. He changed him:

"...After the Civil War the affairs of state, hitherto a collective responsibility,, became characterised by lack of consultation, indecision, indiscipline and even neglect. Indeed, the public became disillusioned and disappointed – the trend was clearly incompatible with the philosophy and image of our corrective regime. The nation was thus being plunged inexorably into chaos. It was obvious that matters could not and should not, be allowed to continue this way".

VII.

Murtala Mohammed's regime acted with such boldness and speed that even a large section of the Nigerian Left was dazed and carried away. Within a couple of weeks of coming to power all military officers above the rank of Brigadier were retired. This was followed by massive purges of the civil service, the police, the judiciary, the universities, etc. Altogether, about 10,000 civil servants (out of a total of 750,000) were removed. There were several categories of offences: Declining productivity, redundancy, poor health, corruption, indiscipline, doubtful loyalty, etc. As always, the working people, who had nowhere to fall back, bore the brunt of the purges. They constituted the overwhelming majority of those purged.

State-house chroniclers and bourgeois story-tellers will like us to forget that radical criticism, patriotic struggles and political heroism almost exclusively provided the grounds, created the political and psychological atmosphere and assisted the Murtala group to come to power and consolidate this power. In other words, the Nigerian Left, rather than the Nigerian bourgeoisie whose interests the regime was later to serve so faithfully, brought Murtala-Obasanjo's junta to power.

To convince oneself of this, an honest researcher should simply examine the civilian circles whose friendship Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo courted between 1972 and 1975; the wave of radical criticism, students' protests, workers strikes and popular-democratic challenge between January and July 1975; the reaction of a large fraction of the left to the coup; the character of official and unofficial advisers chosen by the government after its inauguration; and the texts of the speeches delivered at home and abroad by Mohammed and Obasanjo in the first few months of their regime.

It was tragic that a left that had 10 years earlier, failed to recognise a genuine revolution when it erupted now saw 'leftism' in-a regime that was neither revolutionary in the context of our situation nor claimed to be. Murtala radicalism and anti-imperialism were not leftist, they were bourgeois. A similar left-mistake took place with regard to the present regime. On both occasions the left having helped to defeat a fascist regime, was not only bitterly disappointed but was soon to become a victim of a new form of fascism.

By November 1975 when army promotions were announced, the radical student movement had become largely alienated from the Murtala regime. The army promotions and the 1975 Christmas day attack by Nigerian soldiers on civilian population of Ugep (Cross River State) opened the eyes of the Nigerian left. The IMF and SAP did a similar thing in 1986 in respect of the present regime.

In October 1975, General Murtala Mohammed announced a political programme for the country's return to democratic civilian rule on October 1, 1979. The following political steps were set down to lead to this restoration; Creation of more states in the country; the designation of a new Federal Capital Territory; creation of local councils and organisation of election into them; the appointment and setting to work of a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC); election of a Constituent Assembly (CA) to consider the draft constitution to be produced by the CDC; lifting of the ban on political activities and the recognition of genuinely national parties; the holding of federal and state elections; and the handing over of power to democratically elected governments on October 1, 1979.

By the time of his assassination four-and-a-half months later Murtala Mohammed had, in fact, designated a Federal Capital Territory, created more states, and set up a 49-member, all-male Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). A considerable number of leftists were included in the committee. He had also cancelled the controversial results of the 1971-72 census figures. This census, like the one before it (1962-63), had stirred up considerable bourgeois noise. Indeed the reactions to the figures provided General Gowon with a reason for cancelling his plan to hand over power to a civil government. Four events between late 1975 and early 1976 sharpened the contradictions within the new regime and between the regime and sections of the population and between the regime and imperialism. These events and the various reactions to them indicated clearly the path of further development and inevitable collapse of the "new" political orientation.

First, the regime, shocked by the momentum and logic of the purges it had initiated, halted in mid-stream and set up a machinery for considering protests from purged public servants. Secondly, the regime promoted several military officers (Mohammed, Obasanjo, Danjuma, Bisalla, etc) to the ranks of General, Lieutenant-General, Major-General and Brigadier. This exercise brought a wave of protests from radical organisations (students, political groups, etc) and perhaps the first internal discontent within the regime. Some army officers, especially field commanders in the (1967-70) civil war, were clearly disaffected. When the students of the University of Ibadan criticised the promotions, the regime dispatched a prominent Nigerian leftist to Ibadan to chastise the "erring" youths. He did.

Thirdly, the regime's support for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the post-independence Angolan civil war clearly alarmed conservative army officers and their civilian allies and, of course, the imperialists. General Mohammed's rebuff to President Ford and his fiery speech at the OAU summit in Addis Ababa in January 1976 further marked him down in the imperialist circles as a dangerous, and hence unwanted African leader. Mohammed's speech was drafted not by the bourgeoisie, *but* by leftist intellectuals in Nigeria.

Lastly, Mohammed's broadcast on February 3, 1976, in which he announced the re-division of the country into 19 states (from the original 12) and the dismissal with ignominy from the Armed Forces of 10 of Gowon's twelve (12) military governors antagonised

several serving military officers. Ten days later, a thoroughly reactionary, sectional and pro-imperialist coup, in which General Mohammed lost his life, was attempted. He had been accused by the rebels of turning the country to communism!

VIII.

The attempted coup of February 13, 1976, came as a nodal point in the chain of contradictions between the regime's radical and anti-imperialist politics and pronouncements on the one hand, and its silence over the dominantly pro-imperialist economic policies which it inherited from Gowon; between the regime's desire for popular legitimacy by means of public-service purges and anti-corruption campaign and its inability to mobilise the popular masses consciously and systematically. Within six months, the regime had antagonised so many bourgeois interests and set in motion a general political dislocation which it had neither the capacity nor the will to control. The working people and students, the only social forces capable of confronting the expected reactionary backlash, were not mobilised. Had the regime's radical pronouncements been accompanied by mass mobilisation, Dimka could not have attempted his coup.

The February tragedy claimed the lives of several military officers while about 50 people, including civilians and senior military officers were later publicly executed as participants or accomplices in the incident. Many others were given various terms of imprisonment. General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, and a famous war commander became the Head of State - reluctantly as he later claimed. Federal and state governments were reconstituted, while the nation was promised a continuation of the same general line and programme set down by the late Head of State.

Again, radical sections of the population, and not the bourgeoisie, rose to defend the nation. Long before the attempted coup was crushed, thousands of workers and students from the University of Lagos commandeered vehicles to oppose the armed reaction. A National Mourners⁵ Association was formed; American and British embassies

were attacked and calls were made - of course in vain - for diplomatic relations with America and Britain to be terminated. Since 1976, every February 13 has been observed by sections of the-Nigerian left in memory of General Murtala Mohammed. The Nigerian bourgeoisie have largely forgotten him except in sponsored articles and books and in the naming of streets, structures and public institutions. These are all passive and opportunistic forms of remembrance.

The popular masses, led by the Nigerian left, brought Murtala Mohammed to power, radicalised and defended his regime, avenged his assassination and immortalised his name. But what did the popular masses and the Nigerian left get in return? A wage freeze was imposed on workers, strikes were banned and 'offenders' threatened with execution, imprisonment and proscription of their union; inflation rose; radical students, who had endangered their lives during the attempted coup - while the bourgeoisie were in hiding - were rusticated or simply shot; universities and colleges were closed down.

Meanwhile, oil revenues increased, the bourgeoisie and military-bureaucratic capitalists increased their affluent consumption and doubled their holdings. Imperialists continued their plunder of our resources. Obasanjo's regime introduced an empty agrarian programme termed Operation Feed the Nation or OFN. It introduced colour television into a country where the vast majority of the population lived, and still live, in a state of economic, political and social marginalisation, filth and poverty. Prestige state festivals and international jamborees were organised and millions of naira squandered. The regime promulgated a Land Use Decree which dispossessed poor peasants. It attempted to control the prices of manufactured goods and foodstuffs, and even attempted to control house rents by decree. The attempts failed woefully.

While the transition programme was being executed, the regime intervened in the running of trade unions, took them over and bureaucratized them. Thereafter, the regime played an active role in selecting the leadership of the new unions as well as that of the new central labour organisation which it created. The regime then moved against the students, once again, by increasing university fees. But the university students, organised under the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) rose in revolt. The regime reacted violently: A number of students were killed several others wounded and yet others rusticated. A kangaroo commission of inquiry found several university teachers and

administrators "guilty", and recommended their dismissal. They were accordingly dismissed. The students apex organization, NUNS, was banned.

Between August 1978 when the ban on politics and political activities was lifted, after 12 years, and December of the same year, about 50 political parties were announced. The right-wing parties included the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) which some people described as centrist; the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); the Nigerian People's Party (NPP); and the Great Nigerian People's Party, (GNPP). On the left were the People's Redemption Party (PRP), the Socialist Working People's Party (SWPP), the Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth (SPWFY), the Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP), etc. There were also fascist as well as farcical gatherings, such as You-Chop-I-Chop Party.

In December, 1978 after officials of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) had visited federal and local offices of the parties which submitted applications for official registration, five political parties were announced as eligible for the impending electoral contests. These were NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP and PRP. The choice of these five parties was a brilliant political act: While making sure that no Marxist-Leninist party was registered, the authorities ensured that the main ideological and ethnic-cultural factions of the bourgeoisie were well represented (NPN, NPP, UPN and GNPP). On the other hand the registration of the immensely popular, but geographically limited PRP was a realistic move to defuse the potential of left-wing disaffection, especially in the northern parts of the country.

In the elections that followed in 1979, the NPN won the Presidency as well as the governorship race in seven of the 19 states (Sokoto, Niger, Bauchi, Kwara, Cross River, Rivers and Benue states); the GNPP won two states (Gongola and Borno states); NPP won three (3) states (Anambra, Imo and Plateau states); and the PRP won two states - Kano and Kaduna states.

IX.

The Second Civilian Republic (1979 -1983) was a mere second edition of the First Republic (1960-1965) becoming even more so as the Republic drew to a close. The same set of problems - on a higher level - beset the republic: brutally-conducted competition for primitive capitalist accumulation, tribalism arising from this and the unresolved national question; corruption; political intolerance; exploitation and denial of basic human rights.

We recall that as the First Civilian Republic drew to a tragic close, the electoral political parties had coalesced into two broad alliances: The NPC - controlled Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the NCNC - led United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). Similarly, by the beginning of 1983, electoral political competition in the Second Republic had produced two broad alliances: One around the NPN, the ruling party at the centre and the other around the uneasy UPN-NPP-GNPP-PRP alliance. The latter alliance at various times took the name of Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA) and 'Progressive Peoples' Party (PPP). We recall that in November 1979, Tai Solarin, a leading member of the UPN, who is also a well-known liberal democrat in the country predicted as follows: "If this government (meaning the NPN-controlled Federal Government) lasts four years, ... the four year-old NPN will have been firmly planted as a government party everywhere, and the UPN, GNPP, the NPP, and the PRP will have been drained to annihilation both in membership - it is already starting - and in morale. The 1983 election would therefore be between the NPN and the Revolutionary Party which having studied How the NPN came to power knows exactly what to do to supplant the NPN for the presidency. Then there would be confusion on the national raft. Then a splash. Then commotion among the sharks. And we, the common people, will have, as victims, paid the supreme sacrifice". (*Nigerian Tribune*, November 4, 1974).

Ignoring its extreme pessimism and metaphysical reference to supreme sacrifice, we can now say that one of the main thrusts of this prediction, namely, the draining to annihilations" of all anti-NIPN constitutional parties came true. The second thrust, namely the development of a "revolutionary party", nearly came true. At the time of the December 1983 coup a new revolutionary organisation involving the most radical of all anti-NPN forces was already in its formative stages. The coup halted the development.

In the early hours of Saturday, December 30, 1983, three months after Shehu Shagari was sworn in (after violent and disputed federal and state elections) for a second four-year term as Nigeria's second President and three days after he (President Shagari) had presented his 1984 budget speech before a joint session of the National Assembly in Lagos, the Nigerian Army struck and overthrew the civilian regime. The following broadcast was made over the Nigerian radio.

"Fellow country-men and women, I, Brigadier Sani Abacha of the Nigerian Army address you this morning on behalf of the Nigerian Armed Forces. You are all living witnesses to the grave economic predicament and uncertainty which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation for the past four years, I am referring to the harsh intolerable condition under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and beggar nation. There is inadequacy of food at reasonable prices for our people who are now fed up with endless announcements of importation of foodstuffs.

"Health services are in shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics, without drugs, water and equipment. Our educational system is deteriorating at alarming rates. Unemploying figures, including the graduates have reached an embarrassing and unacceptable proportions. In some states, workers are being owed salary arrears of 8-12 months. In others there are threats of salary cuts. Yet our leaders revel in squandermania and corruption, and indiscipline continue to proliferate public appointments in complete disregard of our stark economic realities.

"After due consultation over these deplorable conditions, I and my colleagues in the armed forces have, in the discharge of our national role as the promoters and protectors of national interest decided to effect a change in the leadership of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to form a Federal Military Government. This task has just been completed".

As in most of the military coups before it, both in Nigeria and elsewhere, the stated aims of Buhari-Idiagbon coup as recorded in the statement above were quite different from its real intentions. The latter can be articulated or distilled from the controversies leading up to the coup and the immediate policies and actions of the

coup leaders. After almost seven years, we are now able to say that the young men of the Mohammed-Obasanjo regime recaptured power from the bourgeois politicians (to whom they handed it exactly four years earlier) for three main reasons.

The first was to prevent the revolutionary forces from coming to power. We know that radical forces (the truly oppressed and the deeply disaffected) prepared, after the 1965 Western Regional elections, to launch an aimed rebellion. The violence of October 1965 to January 1966 was a mere skirmish. Similarly after the rigging of the 1983 elections and as the masses were disputing some of the results with arms, sections of the radical political movements started to talk seriously about the need to confront Shagari's fascist state physically. The Buhari-Idiagbon intervention knowingly pre-empted this "new thinking"¹, as the pattern of arrests later indicated.

The second reason was to restore the authority and retrieve the political image of the Nigerian bourgeoisie, as a ruling class. For this, the military had to punish the bourgeois politicians who had so discredited and hence, endangered the bourgeois social order through corruption, indiscipline, political weakness and "economic mismanagement".

The third reason was to punish radicals and their allies in some of the legally established parties for almost harassing the NPN out of power. This explains the arrests of and long incarcerations of radicals like Haroun Adamu (of the PRP) and Ebenezer Babatope (UPN). Before the coup these two radicals had, in fact, engaged General Buhari, then the GOC of Nigerian Army's Third Division based in Jos in public political controversies, Buhari was a known NPN supporter. In tact returns of the Presidential elections in Jos Army Barracks show that NPN scored more than 95 per cent in a state where the latter conceded defeat in both elections (1979 and 1983) to the NPP.

Finally the military junta wanted to present the Nigerian Army as the alternative political party, capable of creating and maintaining law, order and discipline in the country.

In concluding this series, we note that every regime in Nigeria, since independence, had been compelled - in its search for legitimacy - to admit, if only superficially, the truth of the enduring misery of the people. But this admission is made only once, namely, at the regime's inauguration.

Thereafter the regime, compelled by the logic of its commitment to capitalist development, would embark not on the task of removing, from the shoulders of the people the burden it had identified, but on the iniquitous project of constructing an additional layer of burden for the weary shoulder of "fellow Nigerians" - as the people are endearingly called at each inauguration.

The military manifesto on which the Buhari-Idiagbon regime, having overthrown the four-year-old civilian regime of Shehu Shagari based its claim to legitimacy, patriotism and "heroism", may be distilled into a number of specific charges against the Shagari regime:

- Inept, corrupt and indisciplined leadership;
- Imposition of harsh and intolerable conditions on the people;
- Collapse of health services;
- Deterioration of the educational system;
- Rising unemployment;
- Failure to pay workers' wages for upwards of eight months;
- Threat of salary cuts;
- Economic mismanagement which reduced the country to "a debtor and beggar nation" and imposed on her a condition of uncertainty.

We, of course, testify that the charges which Buhari made against Shagari were valid. But then, the burden which the civilian government imposed on the nation was not just one arising from corruption, indiscipline, squandermania and economic mismanagement: a problem which could - at least, theoretically be solved by enthroning an honest, disciplined and morally upright regime endowed with sound economic knowledge. The problem had a deeper root, namely: capitalist-oriented development.

On August 27, 1985, some members of the military regime organised and executed a putsch which removed Buhari and Idiagbon as Head of State and Chief of

Staff, Supreme Headquarters, respectively, Ibrahim Babangida - now assuming the title of President - took the place of Buhari while Ebitu Ukiwe (a Navy Commodore) and Domkat Bali, an army general shared the position from which Idiagbon was removed. Apart from these two replacements, the core of the military junta remained the same.

In response to the assertion that radicals largely joined the celebration of the collapse of Buhari-Idiagbon fascist-like regime, I shall reply that this "celebration" of the departure of Buhari and Idiagbon did not translate to a celebration of Babangida's arrival. Having learnt from previous radical postures of military regimes, the bulk of the left remained not only cynical but, in cases, hostile to undue celebration.

The reaction of Left opportunists was, however, easily understood. It has been the self-imposed task of Nigerian left-opportunism to mobilise support for every new regime. They did exactly this in August 1975 when Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo with their short-lived radicalism came to power - although, in this case, the opportunists achieved a tremendous success. For sections of the Nigerian left still regard Mohammed as a nationalist, a hero and a martyr.

The attitude of radical Awoists is equally, explicable. Awo's supporters had been particularly brutalised by the Buhari-Idiagbon regime. On being released from long periods of detentions shortly after Babangida came to power, the Awoist radicals came to embrace the new regime. But just as the left-lionisation of Mohammed started to wane before long Babangida's initial popularity among the Nigerian left has been waning.

As tradition demanded, the new regime mounted its own manifesto. It accused the Buhari-Idiagbon faction of the erstwhile Supreme Military Council (SMC) of: failing to reverse the national economic decline and to check corruption; alienating the majority faction of the SMC and usurping the collective power and authority of that body; being arrogant, intolerant and using the security agency to harass, dehumanise and blackmail its opponents - real or imaginary; and failing to appreciate the fragile nature of the composition, constitution and structure of the nation – that is between the nation's various sections.

Nigerians can testify that these and many more, were true of Buhari's 20-month fascist rule. But then more than five years after this regime came to power the state of the Nigerian

nation, seen and described by the regime in August 1985, has hardly improved. Some would say it has worsened.

The Nigerian masses are today hungry, desperate, and cynical, it is therefore not a surprise that most of them are alienated from the present political process. The situation is made worse by the battle against "extremists", "radicals" and progressive orientations both within and outside the state-sponsored political parties. Most of the so-called "new breed" politicians who are engaged in the process are not interested in social progress, the liberation of the people or genuine democracy. They are cynics and opportunists. They are in the political process simply to replace the military if they choose to leave or form a sort of diarchy with them if they change their mind about leaving.