

ON Thursday November 30, 2006, Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian security agent, died in a London hospital of radioactive poisoning widely suspected to have been carried out by the Russian state. The man had defected to the West some years ago because, according to him, he feared for his life after refusing to kill as ordered, a Russian citizen that the Russian state considered an enemy and a threat to "state security". For refusing to carry out an illegal death sentence, Litvinenko himself was illegally sentenced to death. His escape from Moscow to London only gave him a reprieve. Eventually the "long arms" of the Russian state caught up with him and his death sentence was executed in a London restaurant.

That event was the immediate inspiration for this article. Among the titles I considered and then discarded, for the exercise were "the state as embodiment of criminality", "the state as a consummate evil", "this evil called the state" and "the state as a necessary evil". Although these captions were discarded in favour of the one now used, they threw up ideas to be explored and propositions to be considered or re-considered. The case of Litvinenko serves as a "peg" for this brief introduction.

The state has not always existed; its emergence in human history is bound up with the emergence of private property in the means of material production and exchange; and in the latter is rooted to the emergence of social classes. It, therefore, follows that the state will continue to exist at least as long as private property in the means of production and exchange remains and hence, as long as social classes to which it gave rise remain. Bemoaning the existence of the state or the crimes through which it perpetuates itself – as long as its material and historical foundations remain – is therefore like barking at the moon. That is a main contention between Marxism and Anarchism.

Conversely, insisting that the state will remain forever is the same as saying

# The state and its criminality

By Edwin Madunagu

that private property in the means of production will remain forever, and that social classes as materially determined social categories, will remain. That is an age-long debate between Marxists on the one hand, and non-Marxists and anti-Marxists of various tendencies, on the other. That debate cannot be exhausted here.

But whatever position you hold on the origins, nourishment and historical destiny of the state, you are likely to subscribe to the following contemporary functions of the state. We may adopt Ernest Mandel's classification of these functions. According to Mandel, in his *Late Capitalism*, there are three broad groups of functions. The first is the "provision of those general conditions of production which cannot be assured by the private activities of the members of the dominant class". This is clear enough – for even in these days of total privatisation, the state still constructs and maintains roads and irrigations and a wide range social-economic infrastructure and institutions. These are protected by the state against all possible "encroachments".

The second group of state functions is the "repression of any threat to the prevailing mode of production from the dominated classes or particular sections of the dominant classes, by means of army, police, judiciary and prison-system". These are the well-known coercive functions of the state. The point here is that the threats envisaged are not only from the dominated classes but also from "particular sections of the dominant classes" which may feel cheated, or otherwise disaffected. Not only does the state not represent the interests of all the people, it does not even at every point in time represent the interests of all sections of the dominant classes equally, or even equitably. Or else, how do we explain palace coups or state-sponsored assassinations of committed members of the ruling class?

The third set of state functions is the

"integration of the dominated classes, to ensure that the ruling ideology of the society remains that of the ruling class, and that consequently the exported classes accept their own exploitation without the immediate exercise of repression against them. These are the ideological functions of the state carried out by the media, and the school system in the main. Whereas "classical Marxism" focused more on the second set of functions, latter Marxist intellectuals, such as George Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci, elaborated on the third. The refrain is this: The state does not maintain its power by force alone. It is the second set of functions of the state – the repressive functions – as elaborated above, that is tragically illustrated by the story of the Russia's ex-state spy, Alexander Litvinenko.

Alexander Litvinenko was born in 1962 in Russia which was then the largest of the 15 republics that made up the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union. After graduating from secondary school in 1980, at the age of 18, he was drafted into the state security police. In other words, just out of school at the age of 18, Alexander Litvinenko was inducted into the state security police, the uncompromising enforcer of state security, the "murder machine" of the state. Sections of this security force are open, others secret. In 1985, Litvinenko graduated from a military college and was appointed a platoon commander. The following year in 1986, at the age of 24, he became a KGB agent, that is, an officer of the central organisation of Soviet State security. Thus, at the age of 24, he acquired the licence to kill in defence of the state.

The Soviet Union was succeeded in 1991 by Russia, and officer Alexander Litvinenko was absorbed by the new Russ-

ian security apparatus. He was promoted that same year to the Central Staff, "specialising in counter-terrorist activities and infiltration of organised crimes". He took part in several military actions and rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He won several honours and promotions. His last responsibility was that of protecting a wealthy Russian businessman, Boris Berezovsky, when the latter was in the government of the first Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. Everything appeared to be going well for the brilliant young state security officer until November, 1998.

On Tuesday November 17, 1998, the "gates of hell" opened in Moscow. Boris Yeltsin was still president; and the current president, Vladimir Putin, was head of Russia's security apparatus. On that day, five officers of the apparatus, including Alexander Litvinenko, addressed a press conference in which they accused their superiors of ordering them, precisely a year earlier, to assassinate Boris Berezovsky who was then Secretary of the Russia's Security Council. It was a devastating indictment of Russia's state security apparatus – the heart of the state structure – and its leadership. With the benefit of hindsight – in particular, the fact that Putin, the head of that apparatus, was to succeed Yeltsin within a year as President – we can now say that it was an indictment of the Russian state and two of its leading functionaries: Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin.

Some questions can be asked here. Litvinenko was ordered to murder someone and he refused. Was that likely to be the first time he was ordered to commit such a crime? Was he aware, at that rank of Lt-Colonel, that it was in the sphere of duty of the counter-insurgency apparatus to eliminate "enemies of the state"? What made the case of Berezovsky different? Is it conceivable that Litvinenko had never eliminated anyone, or had not known of any state elim-

ination, before Berezovsky? I submit that the Russian state did not become evil in 1998 when Litvinenko rose in rebellion. The state – every state – has always been evil.

The Russian government was thoroughly embarrassed by these allegations. Then followed a period of hide-and-seek, and arrest-and-release. Eventually, both Berezovsky and Litvinenko fled to London. Litvinenko asked for asylum; and it was granted. He asked for British citizenship; this was also granted. While in London he devoted himself to investigating and exposing crimes allegedly committed by the Russian state. He wrote books, granted interviews, and attended meetings. Beyond that, he systematically exposed the links between the Russian intelligence community and leading politicians in Western Europe. In short, Litvinenko declared war against the Russian state and its perceived collaborators, and waged this war with militant messianism.

On Tuesday, November 21, 2006, a couple of days before his death, Alexander Litvinenko dictated a statement from his hospital bed in London. In it he addressed the Russian President Vladimir Putin: "You may succeed in silencing me but that silence comes with a price. You have shown yourself to be as barbaric and ruthless as your most hostile critics have claimed. You have shown yourself to have no respect for life, liberty or any civilised value. You have shown yourself to be unworthy of your office, to be unworthy of the trust of civilised men and women. You may succeed in silencing one man but the howl of protest from around the world will reverberate Mr. Putin, in your ears for the rest of your life."

I subscribe to this statement, as I personally mourn him. But, unfortunately and tragically, it was like barking at the moon. Similar barkings were heard after the murder of President John Kennedy of America in 1963, after the murder of Pope John Paul I in 1978, and after the death of Abiola in 1988.