

# There are alternatives

By Edwin Madunagu

(1983). The latter was to be overthrown 20 months later by General Ibrahim Babangida (1985).

We should also remember that at this time almost all Third World countries, including Nigeria, were heavily indebted to various clubs in the centres of capitalism (Washington, London and Paris). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was enforcing the terms of repayment. Also at this time the Soviet Union, and countries dependent and modeled on it, were already experiencing serious economic problems - which turned out to be terminal problems. These problems became terminal for them as states attempting or pretending to build alternative systems to capitalism.

The beginning of the "end of history" was therefore characterised by deep economic - and also social - problems in the Third World and the "socialist camp". While the "socialist camp" was left to continue its descent, the centres of world capitalism devised a solution, called the structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), for the Third World. This programme embodied a set of conditions or (conditionalities) which the indebted countries had to meet before they were bailed out of their heavy indebtedness. Most of the debtor-countries (or rather, their governments) could not think of any alternative. So, they accepted the conditions. But the creditors would not accept idle acceptance. The acceptance was policed by the IMF and the World Bank which the centres of capitalism controlled. While the IMF ensured that the conditionalities were met, the World Bank acted as the "Ministry of Propaganda" for the centres of capitalism.

It is important to note that some Third World leaders - within and outside government - warned that the so-called debts

man who was born into poverty. He presented me with TINA, or the Nigerian version of it. I argued that there are alternatives - several of them. It was a depressing and wasted argument. But it sobered me - ironically because the man regards himself as, and carried the air of, a "progressive". And he is widely regarded as such.

If an educated progressive could shout TINA, what would a "non-progressive" proclaim? When I asked him if TINA would also apply to the political system, he answered in the negative. He rejected the notion that there are links between Nigeria's primitive neoliberal capitalist economy, on the one hand, and the phenomenon of state robbery, rigged elections, high-profile assassinations and local terrorism, on the other hand. What a pity! To complete the picture, I asked my friend for his opinion on the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. He supported the overthrow of those countries' former regimes by American forces. What of the people now fighting occupation troops in these countries? He dismissed them as animals. Not criminals, but animals. My friend's parting opinion reminded me of a core thesis in Jean Bricmont's *Humanitarian Imperialism: Using human rights to sell war*, namely, that leftists who support the new imperialism's "humanitarian intervention" are "useful idiots of imperialism". Harsh words - but true and appropriate.

Let us return to TINA, and ask the question: At what point, exactly, did the roads to alternatives close? Or, at what point did history come to an end? Or, at what point was history frozen? We shall answer our own questions. The signals of the impending "end of history" first appeared in the early 1980s. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were presiding over the affairs of America and Britain respectively. Alhaji Shehu Shagari and his National Party of Nigeria (NPN) were ruling over Nigeria. They were soon to be overthrown by General Muhammadu Buhari

The first time I came across the word TINA in politics I was confused. That was about two years ago. I knew that many personal names, mainly female, end with TINA. I had also met people, exclusively female, who claimed that their own TINA was not a shortened form of a longer name, but a full name. But I had never, before then, encountered the word in politics. And I was annoyed (or is it embarrassed) that the foreign columnist I was reading had simply assumed that it was a common word that his readers should know. After overcoming my confusion, I embarked on a frantic search. The result was an anti-climax: TINA stands for "There is no alternative". I took the meaning back to the text.

What the author was saying is this: There is no alternative to the present neoliberal and globalised capitalist economy. He was saying this of an economic system whose basic operational logical is the removal - from the people, especially the poor - of every protection that the state had been compelled to provide against the worst ravages of capitalism. The author was saying that whatever the consequences to the poor and weak nations, and their peoples, there is no alternative to the present system of unrestricted flow of goods, labour and capital across the globe. He was saying that not only is there no alternative to mass poverty and misery in the Third World, there is also no alternative to the real danger of physical destruction that the planet earth faces from massive environmental degradation and the phenomenon that Samir Amin has described as "permanent war and Americanisation of the world".

This was the submission of that ideologue of TINA. It is a triumphal, or pessimist, or escapist, ideology, depending on which side you are, and whose partisan you are. Somehow, I forgot this encounter. But, recently, I was reminded of TINA in the course of my discussion with a distant friend of mine, a Nigerian male of my own generation, a man who had travelled far and wide, a

Union. This succession of dramatic events, coupled with capitalist globalisation that was marching southwards and eastwards, marked the end of history, the point at which all alternative ways of organising society disappeared!! So the triumphalists proclaimed. The present piece is just the background to the false theory or ideology of TINA. In subsequent installments the global alternatives, the emerging alternatives in Latin America and the clear alternatives in Nigeria will be explored.

Some endnotes to this brief historical account are necessary to conclude this introductory piece. Many years ago, I thought that there were two-world markets - the capitalist market and the socialist market - and that the two were in competition. I held this position for quite some time, until I learnt that there was, in fact, only one world market; and that this single market was controlled by capitalist forces, with the socialist states participating peripherally in it. More specifically, the international financial institutions including, in particular, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - all controlled by the leading capitalist states - had no rivals in the "socialist camp". The socialist countries belonged to, and participated in, them even if peripherally.

The foregoing may help us recapture the nature and terms of the "competition" between the capitalist system and the socialist system - a competition that capitalism won! But that was not the case. It is not that capitalism and socialism went into combat - like two evenly matched boxers - and capitalism defeated or "killed" socialism. The fact of history is that the socialist idea and the socialist movement developed within the capitalist society in opposition to that mode of production and to capitalists as ruling classes. The history of anti-capitalist opposition has been a chequered one. It is a particularly tragic moment of this history that has been proclaimed the "end" of world history by the triumphalists. But that is not the case - as we shall see.

owed by the poor countries were, to use Fidel Castro's words, "unrepayable and uncollectable". Hence, they suggested that these countries should find ways of coming out of their problems other than trying to repay the debts, or accepting the conditions for moratorium on repayment, or rescheduling of repayment. They warned that attempting to pay off the debts, or accepting the prescribed conditions for temporary reprieve, would only deepen the problems and make the indebted countries more dependent, and their peoples poorer. The advice was, of course, ignored. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was a "second slavery" - for the nations involved and for their peoples. It was soon to be replaced by neoliberal capitalist globalisation - a more crushing economic and social regime for the poor and the weak of the world.

In the meantime, in April 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union as General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party. To deal with the acute problems he inherited, Gorbachev chose to introduce market-oriented economic, social and political reforms. The reforms soon went out of hand, anarchy took over, and the ruling party started to lose power. Nationalist agitations, inspired and funded by the rulers of America, soon enveloped both the constituent republics of the Soviet Union and the dependent, Soviet-type, states of eastern and central Europe. In panic, Gorbachev unilaterally ended the "Cold War" by renouncing Soviet Union's super power-status, dissolving the political-military pact that bound the Soviet Union to its allies, and renouncing the leading role of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.

The consequences were immediate. In the second half of 1989, almost all the Communist Party-led socialist regimes in central and eastern Europe were overthrown. And then, in December 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. This was followed less than 24 months later by the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet

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IN 2004, the New York-based Monthly Review Press put out a 130-page book titled: *The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanisation of the World*. The author of the book is Samir Amin, a veteran intellectual activist of African origin, but of global influence. Three years later, in July 2001, the Monthly Review magazine devoted its July/August double-issue to the "revolt in Latin America".

The two publications are complementary. They deal with the same question, namely, how the poor and weak peoples and nations of the world can liberate themselves from the present extremely unequal and brutal global order; or, rather, alternative ways of organising society and ordering the world for the benefits of the poor, the weak, the exploited and the dehumanised. While the 2004 book deals with this question globally, the 2007 publication focuses on Latin America where a revolt in the direction of liberation had, in fact, started. I shall draw heavily from these books in the remaining installments of this series.

On page 85 of his book Amin regretted: "If Europeans had reacted in 1935 or 1937, they would have succeeded in stopping the Hitlerian madness. By reaching only in September 1939 they allowed dozens of millions of victims to have that madness inflicted on them". He then warned: "We must act sooner rather than later to face the challenge of Washington's neo-Nazis". Earlier he had lamented: "That a regime (American regime) governed by the political mechanisms of democracy again takes up, to its advantage, the principle (of 'might is right') proudly held by the Nazis is not an attenuating circumstance, but, on the contrary, makes it even more heinous".

But, why this "America-bashing"? A one-line answer can be given: The present world order has been imposed by the American regime, leading the European Union and Japan - the other two members of the "imperialist triad". And what is this "world order"? Its full name is neoliberal capitalist globalisation. But it is not just

globalisation. What is wrong with that? The globalisation is capitalist and neoliberal. We know what capitalism is - its grossly unequal relations between social classes and groups within nations and between nations. What of neoliberalism?

We shall come to precise working definitions. But, for now, look at Nigeria to see neoliberalism at work. Neoliberalism is privatisation, or rather, the legal theft, by means of state power, of all assets and means of production collectively owned by the people; massive retrenchment of workers, officially explained as "public service reforms", deregulation, or complete surrender of the material life of the people to the dictates of almighty market; commercialisation, which means you pay for everything, or you enjoy nothing as of right as a citizen - not health, not education, not housing; not safe water. The effects of these policies include: ever - rising prices of essential commodities and services, rising unemployment, poverty, misery, criminal marginalisation and insecurity. And, of course, high profile corruption or state robbery; and ever widening gap between the rich and the poor.

All the neoliberal policies have been imposed on Nigeria and other poor and weak nations by the "imperialist triad". How? First, through the logic of age-long unequal relations; secondly, through the enforcer-role of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) - all of which are controlled by the "triad", and thirdly through military violence employed by the American regime - directly or through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). We hasten to add that these policies, and their consequences, are accepted (sometimes enthusiastically) and implemented by the rulers of most of the poor and weak nations, including Nigeria. There is a coincidence of interests between the rulers of the imperialist "triad" and the rulers of the

primary victims.

Neoliberal capitalist globalisation is of course, an economic reality. Yes, but it is also an ideology which promotes globalisation - with its capitalist and neoliberal features - as reality to which there is no alternative, or no viable alternative. The ideologues do not even accept that the ways globalisation affects a poor nation can be negotiated. No. You must accept it, arms folded, in the exact way it is presented and interpreted by the leaders of the imperialist "triad" and their enforcers: the World Bank, the IMF and WTO. But in Latin America, the "original base of American imperialism", the terms of globalisation are now being vigorously negotiated, and re-designed.

We may now go to definitions. Writing in the Monthly Review of April 1999, Robert W. McChesney defined neoliberalism as "the defining economic paradigm of our time - it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control of much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit". Neoliberal democracy he defined as "trivial debate over minor issues by parties that basically pursue the same pro-business policies regardless of formal differences and campaign debate". And globalisation refers essentially to "the explosive growth of huge multinational corporations and vast pools that have crossed national borders and penetrated everywhere". This process, that is globalisation, is "in turn seen as largely the result of a parallel technological explosion in computerisation, telecommunications, and rapid transportation".

Now, if we bear in mind that what we have is not just globalisation, but capitalist globalisation, we shall see that this is a process that has been going on since the appearance of capitalism several centuries ago. What is new is the technological explo-

sion which has made possible the movement of capital and labour with a rapidity that we could not have thought possible just a few decades ago. Capitalism develops by conquering new territories internally and externally. The ultimate result of this dual process - that is, what would happen when there are no more new territories to conquer - was not seriously considered by classical anti-capitalist thinkers. The reason for this, was that it was largely expected that capitalism would be overthrown "and replaced by another system long before its spatial limits had been reached".

Well, this had not happened. It almost happened, but for a series of monumental errors committed by opponents of capitalism - coupled with the internal degeneracy of segments of the socialist movement. Whether capitalism has reached its "spatial limit" or not, it is false, to say the least, to claim there is now no alternative to it. There are alternatives - several of them - as the current revolts in Latin America and several parts of the world are indicating. If you care to analyse the content and character of global anti-globalist campaigns which have been going on since the mid-1990s, and the violent upsurge in the Middle East which is dismissed wholesale as "Islamist extremism", your "there is no alternative", or TINA, chant will be tempered. Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was re-elected president in 2006 on the explicit platform of constructing an alternative to neoliberal capitalist globalisation - an alternative they call "socialism for the 21st century".

Samir Amin lists five objectives of American regime's global hegemonist strategy. They are: "To neutralise and subdue the other partners in the Triad (Europe; USA; Japan) and minimise their capacity to act outside of American control; to establish military control of NATO and "Latin Americanise" the former parts of the Soviet World; to establish undivided control of the Middle East and Central Asia and their petroleum resources; to dismantle China, ensure the subordination of the other

large states (India, Brazil) and prevent the formation of regional blocs which would be able to negotiate the terms of globalisation; and to marginalise the regions of the South and that have no strategic interest for the United States".

The strategic objective of the American regime, the armed imposer of global neoliberalism is "not to tolerate the existence of any power capable of resisting the injunctions of Washington". To carry out that objective, the regime "seeks to dismantle every country that is deemed to be 'too large', so as to create the maximum number of failed states, easy prey for the establishment of American bases ensuring their 'protection'. Only one state has the right to be 'great', the United States threatens everyone. "It arises", he says, "from the same logic as Hitler's: to change economic and social relations through military violence". Furthermore, "the United States is the pre-eminent rough state. It has openly repudiated all respect for legality and for the rights of others".

The conclusion of this installment is that the road to alternative social organisation passes through confrontation with American regime's hegemonist strategy. It can be confronted, and it can be defeated. But, according to Amin, "the fight will take many forms. It requires *diplomatic aspects* (the defence of international law), *military aspects* (the re-arming of every country in the world in order to meet any aggression contemplated by Washington is imperative); and *political aspects* (notably in reference to building a European presence and reconstructing a non-aligned front)". But the success of the struggle "will depend on the ability of people to liberate themselves from liberal illusions".

There will never be an 'authentically liberal globalised economy', Samir Amin concludes. For the World Bank, the main enforcer of neoliberal policies across the globe, is a mere propagandist, issuing cynical homilies on "democracy", "good governance" and "reduction of poverty" on behalf of Washington.

**T**HIS installment deals with the current anti-imperialist revolt in Latin America. It is based, in part, on the July/August double-issue of the Monthly Review. In 2005, Evo Morales was elected President of Bolivia. The first member of the indigenous community to attain that position, Morales was elected on the platform of the Movement Towards Socialism. His campaign theme was explicit: building socialism in Bolivia. After Morales' election, Bolivia joined Cuba and Venezuela to form the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean, or ALBA. This grouping confines itself, for now, to the "development of cooperative barter arrangement". Under it, for example, Venezuela exchanges its oil for twenty thousand Cuban doctors. We all know that Cuban doctors and paramedical professionals have a reputation of working happily in foreign lands, among urban and rural poor.

Simon Bolivar (1783 - 1830), after whom this alliance was named, is referred to in history as "Liberator of South America". It is sufficient, however, to know that he was a Latin American anti-colonial revolutionary leader. Born in Caracas, capital of Venezuela, Bolivar fought to liberate and unite the entire continent. His movement recorded victories, as well as defeats; but its definitive victory was in Bolivia, the country that was later named after him. We can then see the solid historical significance and symbolism of the name, "Bolivarian Alternative", under which Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba are now united: Bolivar was born in Venezuela, he scored a definitive victory in Bolivia, and the current leaders of both countries are inspired by Cuba and its revolutionary leadership. And do not forget that Ernesto Che Guevara, the Argentinian who played a leading role in the liberation of Cuba, died fighting in Bolivia in 1967. Compare this alliance, rooted in history and revolutionary struggle, with the abstract campaign for an African Union Government - a campaign where proponents and opponents are equally opportunistic, unserious, deep in neoliberal illusions and pathetically beholden to Ameri-

can regime.

In 2006, Rafael Correa was elected President of Ecuador. President Correa, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, Bolivia's Morales and Cuba's Fidel Castro are known front-line proponents of "socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century". Some Latin Americans also call the popular resurgence a "Bolivarian Revolution". I prefer the latter name because although a movement or its leadership should be bold to inscribe its mission on its banner, it ought to be careful not to impose a name, or a description, on a process that is just beginning. The current revolt in Latin America is Bolivarian and anti-imperialist; it is against the terms of neoliberal globalisation; its primary constituents are the urban and rural poor. These features already point to alternatives - which imperialist ideologues say do not exist. When the movement becomes explicitly anti-capitalist, then we can speak of socialism or "socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

Also in 2006, Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader, was elected President of Nicaragua. Daniel Ortega led the Sandinistas in an armed struggle that overthrew the American stooge, Somoza, in 1979. Some background to Nicaragua's current resurgence is necessary. A Central American nation of only 5.5 million people, Nicaragua became independent of Spain in 1821. In the first 100 years after independence the country was more or less a colony of the United States of America. Direct military occupation took place between 1909 and 1925, and between 1926 and 1933. During the second occupation Nicaraguan nationalists, under Augusto Cesar Sandino, initiated a guerrilla war of liberation. He was assassinated in 1934 by forces loyal to Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the head of the Nicaraguan National Guard. Somoza took over the Presidency in 1937 and between then and 1979, he and his children ruled Nicaragua on behalf of the American regime.

The Sandinistas, who took their name from the nationalist hero, Sandino,

put an end to the Somoza dynasty in 1979. Between the triumph of that 1979 revolution and 1990 America was literally at war with Nicaragua. In 1990 President Ortega ordered a Presidential election. He lost to a coalition of right-wing groups put together and sponsored by America. Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas lost again in 1996, and again in 2000. But in 2006 they came back to power, via elections. Embarrassed by Daniel Ortega's victory despite all their efforts to make him lose, sections of American media dismissed the election as non-event: Why? Because Ortega was no more a revolutionary - having been converted, or re-converted, to Catholicism!

The July 2006 presidential election in Mexico gave Felipe Calderon, the right-wing candidate 35.89 per cent and Lopez Obrador, the left-wing candidate 35.31 per cent. Obrador's supporters alleged that the election, won by a margin of a mere 0.58 per cent, was rigged. But that is not the significant point here. The significant point is that "over a million and a half people turned out in answer to Obrador's call to march through downtown Mexico City in the first demonstration of post - electoral protest". The President-elect and his American backers were so frightened that, if I remember well, the inauguration was performed outside the National Assembly. Finally, at the end of 2006, Hugo Chavez was re-elected President of Venezuela on the explicit platform of socialism.

Outside electoral politics: Brazil has been witnessing a resurgence of popular struggle. Argentina has repudiated its external debts; a common market, independent of America and called MERCOSUR, has been set up, with Venezuela now a member; the resistance of Columbia's Revolutionary Armed Forces has continued; Fidel Castro of Cuba has been away for more than a year now, and the revolutionary regime has not collapsed. In the

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Month Review magazine of July - August, 2007, John Bellamy Foster summarised these momentous events in Latin America and concluded: "the revolt against U.S. hegemony in Latin America in the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century constitutes nothing less than a new historical moment". Latin America, to quote Noam Chomsky, is "reasserting its independence in an attempt to free itself from centuries of imperialist domination".

Writing on the Cuban Revolution in *Socialism in Cuba* many years ago, Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, both American, advanced two theses which still retain their force. One: "Unless and until the two ruling groups - the foreign and domestic capitalists - are forced to give up their power, property, and privilege, unless the economic and social structures of these countries are radically altered, nothing fundamental will change. The people will remain hungry". Two: "The key event in the Cuban Revolution was the capture of state power by the people led by honest and resolute revolutionaries. All other developments followed from this singular act and Cuba's situation". Remove the question of state power from the consideration of alternatives, and you will simply be barking at the moon.

What is now happening in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela has been described as "using political supremacy to build new production relations". You may describe this as initiating a revolutionary transformation "from above". True enough; but Chavez could not have been elected, and then re-elected, President under the watchful and hateful eyes of the rulers of America without a revolutionary upsurge "from below". He could not have successfully resisted a coup *d'etat* without a revolutionary upsurge within the military and the civil society. And what has he done with state power? Michael Lebowitz reports: "In addition to the expansion of state sectors in oil and basic industry, the new beginning in 2007 already has been marked by the nationalisation of strategic

sector such as communication and electric power, and the recovery of the dominant position for the state in the heavy oil fields where multinational firm had previously prevailed".

President Hugo Chavez took five specific political steps to create the "enabling environment" for the transformation. These were called "five motors". The first was the "enabling law" which allowed Chavez to "bypass the legislature in specific areas for a given period". The law was passed by Venezuelan parliament. The second "motor" was the constitutional amendment. New articles in the amended Constitution, which the people voted into being through a referendum, speak of "ensuring overall human development", "everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality", "developing the creative potential of every human being", "the social economy generates mainly use - values" whose purpose is the construction of a new society. The impact of Bolivarian Revolution on the lives of the people has been tremendous - within a short space of time!

The other "motors" are: political restructuring - what they call a change in the "geometry of the country"; creation and empowerment of grassroots organisations; and educational and ideological campaign "whose consistent theme is the stress upon revolutionary practice in order to build socialism". Lebowitz suggested four pre-conditions for the realisation of Chavez's alternative to capitalism. These include understanding the nature and logic of capitalism, "the logic in which profit rather than satisfaction of the needs of human beings is the goal". There must also be a clear understanding that "the idea of socialism cannot displace real capitalism, nor can dwarfish islands of cooperation change the world by competing successfully against capitalist corporations".

Lebowitz's submission: to steer the nation away definitively in the direction of anti-capitalist alternative you have to take state power from the "captains" of neoliberal capitalist globalism. This is an echo of what Huberman and Sweezy said more than 40-years ago. It is a categorical imperative.

**T**HIS final installment is on Nigeria, our country. And we shall proceed by recapturing some major media reports on the country in the last few weeks. We shall then work out our alternatives through them. The reports would include in the main, those on: the "security" meeting between representatives of the governments of Nigeria, Britain and America; criticisms of the composition of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's cabinet; revocations of some sales and contracts concluded by ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo in the dying days of his tenure; and the Government of National Unity (GNU).

Other reports would include the arraignment of some former state governors for corruption; revenue allocation for the month of May 2007; salaries and allowances of some categories of public officers; retirements in the Armed Forces; "militancy" and armed insurgencies in the Niger Delta; and the resurgence of armed robbery across the country. But since I don't want this "return to source" to extend beyond the present piece, I shall limit myself to two or three stories. The others will be taken up in the future.

The front page lead story of *The Guardian* of Thursday, August 2, 2007, has this introduction: "Four Niger Delta governors yesterday joined a Federal Government team at a meeting in The Hague, Netherlands where restiveness among Nigerian oil-bearing communities and the need to secure the Gulf of Guinea topped the agenda". The state governors were named as those of Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa. The Nigerian government delegation was led by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) whom I recently described in this column as "Secretary-General of the presidency".

The Nigerian delegation was in The Hague to meet with American and British government officials. Also in attendance were representatives of some oil companies operating in Nigerian as well as the Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDCC). As

we have seen in the introduction, the meeting was to discuss the "restiveness in the oil-bearing communities" and the "need to secure the Gulf of Guinea". You should note that "to secure" is a military language and it simply means to control and put out of reach of rivals or enemies.

At the meeting in far-away Netherlands, the leader of the Nigerian delegation lamented that as a partial result of the "restiveness" in its "oil-bearing" communities, Nigeria was losing about 500,000 barrels of oil every day through bunkering and armed disruption of production. This figure, he announced, translates to \$40 million per day. Multiplied by an average exchange rate of 125 to \$1, this loss translates to N5,000 million per day. I have left the units, "billion" and "trillion", alone partly because their magnitudes do not immediately register in our consciousness. However, a million, in our own usage, is a thousand in one thousand places; a billion is a million in one thousand places; and a trillion is a billion in one thousand places, or a million in a million places.

These explanatory notes on units of accounting will become very helpful to our brains when we come to the following subjects: revenue allocation; the money or monies that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alleges that several Nigerian public officers had stolen from the Nigerian state; huge appropriations, as salaries and allowances, by lawmakers and other public officers; and "sale-theft" of state property, called "privatisation".

Now, let us move slowly and carefully. The theme of the Netherlands discussion called a "forum" was "the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS)". Put more elaborately, and more clearly, the theme is the strategy of securing, by military, economic and political means, the source of oil in the Niger Delta of Nigeria for the "International Community" in gener-

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al, and America and Britain, in particular. The leader of the Nigerian delegation was reported as telling the meeting that of all the means on the table for dealing with the Niger Delta question, the military means occupied a decisive position.

On his return to Nigeria, an obviously elated state governor announced that the meeting was very successful. It is clear, very clear, that what was on the table at the meeting in the Hague was the handing over of the military control of the Gulf of Guinea (read Niger Delta) to the "International Community", or America and Britain. I am sure that factions of the ruling blocs in Nigeria and elements in the regime would not mind leasing, or outright ceding segments of the Niger Delta and the oil in their soil, to America and Britain – and collect "rents" for distribution among the various levels of government whose distance from the people is like the distance between the earth and the sun. We should note that in the distribution formula currently in force, the Niger Delta communities are referred to as "oil-bearing communities", while the Nigerian state retains the title "oil-producing". Therein lies a particular injustice in the Niger Delta. The fact is that the Niger Delta communities are "oil-bearing" quite alright; but the present Nigerian state is simply an "oil expropriator". This must change: "the expropriators must be expropriated".

In every definitive alternative to the present social order in Nigeria this surrender of our independence and possession to the international community must be halted, and then reversed. The primary duty of the Nigerian state under an alternative order is first, to secure independently, the integrity of the Nigerian territory and the resources above, on and below its land and waters; and second, to preside over the internal deployment of the resources

according to a just arrangement which must, in any case, be agreed upon in a genuine and democratic national conference. We should however, bear in mind that all these proposals will be worthless unless social and political forces committed to realising them are in power. That is a categorical lesson of history.

This transformation, just in the oil sector, should therefore not only be economic but also social, "security" and political. The political aspect of the transformation is the most critical; it is in fact, the guarantor of the possibility and sustainability of the other aspects. The immediate practical result of the transformation will be substantial and substantive: improvement in the material lives of the people, especially the poorest, the most exploited and the most marginalised in the Niger Delta in particular, and in Nigeria in general; de-escalation of the violence in the Niger Delta; employment, especially in the Niger Delta; and environmental and infrastructural development in the Niger Delta, in particular and Nigeria in general.

In the dying days of ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime, the Federal Government rushed through several acts of privatisation, sales of state-owned houses, contract-awards, price-increases, and appointments. Three particular acts infuriated the people and led the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), in alliance with civil society organisations, to declare a national strike against the newly-inaugurated government of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. These were the sale of the Kaduna and Port-Harcourt oil refineries, increases in the pump-price of petrol and the doubling of the Value-Added Tax or VAT. We are concerned here with the sale of refineries to a business Consortium allegedly for \$721 million, or N93,730 million.

At a tripartite meeting in mid-July 2007 between the Presidency, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE),

President Musa Yar'Adua decided to revoke the sale of the refineries and refunded the money already paid for them. The decision was, not surprisingly, leaked to the buyers who immediately announced their withdrawal from the transaction – before the presidential decision could be communicated to them. In any case, the "deal" was cancelled and the money refunded. The nation jubilated.

From all the reactions to President Yar'Adua's action, I select what Gambo Tuge, the Vice-Chairman of the Tanker Drivers Association told *Newswatch* magazine in Kaduna: "the revocation of the sales of the refineries is the happiest thing that has happened to the common man in recent times in the country. The government had no right from the beginning to sell the refineries, a common heritage of all Nigerians to a few individuals. The government knew exactly what the problems with the refineries were but chose the option that only served the interest of its cronies. We have enough and well-trained engineers to take care of the refineries. Government should give them a free hand to run the facilities because they are capable of sustaining them". This is a clear alternative. I have nothing to add.

Two fundamental questions arise from this episode: one relates to the policy of privatisation itself; and the other relates to the power of public institutions and officers under the "presidential system". Tuge has already dealt with privatisation. The question on the executive presidential system is this: Why should a single individual – call him or her President or governor – have the power to dispense with national assets like the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries? A definitive attack on these two features of the present social order – privatisation and the "almighty" Executive Presidency – will begin to indicate an alternative way forward and will simultaneously be a deadly blow on the head of the current regime of massive and high-profile corruption, or state robbery. But, as noted earlier, the starting point is the coming to power of political and social forces committed to that alternative.