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# The Barrel of a Gun

Political Power in  
Africa and the  
Coup d'Etat

## Part V: The Soldiers Invade: Coup Casebooks

First published by Allen Lane The Penguin Press in 1970

Republished in 2012 by the Ruth First Papers Project

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## Part V

### The Soldiers Invade: Coup Casebooks

## A Coup Inventory

How should one differentiate between coups ? Coups in Africa, no less than elsewhere, do not fall into ideal types. Seeing that it is the first intervention in politics that tends to set up a coup trajectory, by breaking the previously accepted convention that government is for politicians and parties, it is useful to examine coups by the trigger at the start. But the typing of the coup d'etat has limited efficacy; they are often born in a muddle of motives, and they displace their own motives midway as they switch from one type to another and back again in the course of the action.

The simplest and occasionally the initial stage of the coup d'etat cycle is the army strike, or the pay mutiny. Pay strikes are classic instances of class action by the poorest-paid in the army; armies, when they act as trade unions, have the power to hold the state, their paymaster, to ransom. In 1964 in *Tanganyika* (now Tanzania) and the neighbouring East African states of *Kenya* and *Uganda*, the regulars of all the three armies were chafing at service conditions and the slow pace in Africanization of the officer corps.

At the time that Tanganyika achieved independence, there were only three African commissioned officers in the army. (A further fifteen were on training courses.) A request for a crash training programme, a few weeks before the mutiny, produced a scheme by the British commander to have the army Africanized in ten years. But a State House circular shortly before the mutiny announced a slowing down of Africanization, in an attempt to accommodate non-Africans who had opted for Tanganyika nationality under the citizenship provisions of the independence constitution. 'The nation,' the circular had read, 'must use the entire reservoir of skill and experience. It would be wrong

for us to distinguish between Tanganyikan citizens on any ground other than their character and ability. We cannot allow the growth of first and second class citizenship. Africanization is dead.' It was a sharp statement; and among the men preoccupied with promotion prospects, it had a sharp impact. Anonymous letters of grievance had been emanating from the army for some weeks, but they were considered no cause for alarm by the British command. When the mutiny broke, it was men of the First Battalion, Tanganyikan Rifles, who sounded a general alarm at Colito barracks, where they arrested all their officers. Later in the day the Second Battalion mutinied at Tabora, several hundred miles to the west, and there were incidents at a third barracks, in the south. The mutiny was treated as an industrial dispute. Negotiations were opened with the men -led by a sergeant - who were demanding more pay, quicker promotion, the removal of their British officers and complete Africanization. On the third day, the mutiny was considered settled. President Nyerere had broadcast an appeal for calm; and the Cabinet was resuming its functions.

During the next two days, mutiny broke out in the Uganda army barracks at Jinja, and among Kenya forces at Lanet. Both mutinies were put down by British troops, still present in some force in Kenya. Then, when it was thought that the mutiny in Tanganyika was all over, the army men there were seen to stiffen their terms. Evidence came to light of contact between them and a group of political dissidents, reported to have met with a former Opposition leader and several trade-unionists who had emerged as strong critics of the government. Tanganyika requested and received British troops. In Uganda and Kenya the pay strikes had been in no danger of escalating into anything else. In Tanganyika the pay strike was on the verge of becoming a coup that might have brought down the government. The mutineers were court-martialled; the Tanganyikan leadership called on the TANU (government party) Youth League to build a new army; and the government improvised army representation on the national executive committee of the party, alongside similar steps aimed at politicizing the soldiers in support of its policy.

By contrast with the three East African countries, where pay and promotion grievances provoked a mutiny that fell short of a coup, and foreign intervention was invoked to discipline the soldiers, there was *Congo-Kinshasa*, site of Africa's first coup d'etat, which was ushered in by a pay strike.

Independence was in fact not five days old when the army mutinied. The immediate cause was the obduracy of the Belgian army commander in refusing to permit any speed-up in Africanization; after the mutiny, discipline in the army shattered, with bands of armed soldiers becoming instruments for any politician or group that could use them. But the Congo's first army intervention in government shortly afterwards was not locally improvised; nor, for that matter, was the second in 1965. (Little in the crises of the Congo since independence has been.) Mobutu's ascendancy was made possible, when different political groups were advancing their claims through antagonistic forces of armed men, by two decisive acts of outside intervention. The first was when, four days before he acted against the Lumumba government, five million francs were handed over to him by the United Nations, so that he could pay the army.<sup>1</sup> Then Mobutu was helped to create around himself a small but intensely loyal force of paratroopers, through the agency of the Moroccan General Kettani – who had served for many years in the French army – and who headed the United Nations military group charged with assisting in the reorganization of the Congolese army.<sup>2</sup> It was this force that made Mobutu the arbiter of all subsequent political crises in the Congo. Auxiliary power structures were the security and police apparatus, and the College of Commissioners run under Belgian and American aegis.<sup>3</sup> (Incidentally, in the first year of independence, the army's pay increased by 450 per cent.) The army stayed in the background during the political developments of the next five years, and then climbed firmly into power in October 1965 – during the disputes for control between Tshombe and Kasavubu – to install Mobutu as President and Minister of Defence, with Brigadier Leonard Mulamba, the army commander, as Prime Minister, and to announce that the army would rule for five years so as to get the country off on a new start.

The first of the West African coups took place in Togo in 1963, in the third year of independence, and was also triggered off by a pay strike. The immediate cause was the demobilization of veterans in a major French defence re-orientation. When President Sylvanus Olympio refused to take 626 Togolese, who had been serving in metropolitan regiments, into the Togo army, then 250 strong, a group of these ex-servicemen, led by a former master-sergeant, Emmanuel Bodjolle, surrounded his house and shot him. The army installed a civilian government, presided over by Olympio's political rival, Nicholas Grunitzky. Bodjolle made himself colonel, commander and chief-of-staff, while a former sergeant in the French army, Etienne Eyadema (who, it is widely believed, fired the shots that killed Olympio)<sup>4</sup> became a major in an army expanded to 1,200 men. Two years later Eyadema ousted Bodjolle, to make himself colonel and commander, and subsequently to become Togo's head of state.

The pay strike was the trigger for the army coup, but it was not the only source of crisis in Togo. Olympio had built the Comite de l'Unite Togolaise (CUT), as French Africa's first nationalist party. And this he used to score the overwhelming electoral victory which put him at the head of the country's first independence government, in opposition to the party of Nicholas Grunitzky, who had been held in power previously with French support and the backing of Northern chiefs. Just before the army coup, CUT's youth movement split away from it to form the Mouvement de Jeunesse Togolaise, on the grounds that Olympio's policies were entrenching *'les vieux'* among the politicians; were abandoning the party's radical youth and militancy; and were displacing French interests by tying Togo to other foreign interests, particularly American and West German. The replacement of Olympio by Grunitzky, with French-army-oriented and Northern soldiers as his support, won that initial round for France. The North-South conflict was also significantly coincident with the uneven distribution of benefits and government positions. The coup installed a Northern president, who ruled for a predominantly Northern army, with the civil servants – Southerners,

mainly Ewe – manning the ministries in truculent though unexpressed opposition to the real rulers of the land, the army commanders.

In November 1966 there was an attempt to overturn the junta. **It** came not from a section of the army, but from within the administration, and **it** was led by Noel Kutuklui, Lome's leading lawyer and secretary-general of Olympia's former party, renamed Unite Togolaise. This was an attempt to seize power by civilian rather than military means. Some of the government's most senior administrators were involved. Leaflets calling for the toppling of the Grunitzky government were printed on the government's presses; the daily government paper came out for a change of government; and the radio broadcast anti-Grunitzky statements. Kutuklui and an aide occupied Lome's radio station to call for anti-government demonstrations, and claimed, falsely it seemed, that the army was 'behind the rising'; in fact it was the army that cleared the demonstrations off the streets at gunpoint, though with no casualties. French military officers serving as advisers to Togo's army seem to have been mainly responsible for defeating the plot, while American connexions with the anti-French group in CUT had spurred the attempted putsch. A few months after the abortive 'administrator's coup', the army removed Grunitzky, abolished the civilian ministries and took direct control. Eyadema, the former master-sergeant, became President. The Togo cabinet is now a combination of military, police and civilian members; and **it** is difficult to say in what measure it is military rule: but whoever takes decisions, **it** is the army that enforces them.

The experiences of the three coups d'etat that started as pay strikes suggests that it may take a foreign intervention on the side of government to stop an army pay strike from escalating into a military seizure of the state. Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda used foreign troops surgically to terminate the coup before it could develop into something worse; Togo, with some evidence that French defence advisers inclined not to government but to its antagonists, fell victim; and in the Congo, foreign intervention secured the army command and political control of the state for a chief-of-staff who was, in time, to

constitute the most strongly entrenched army-backed regime in Africa.

If pay strikes can topple governments, the military often intervene in politics to reinforce regimes. These are not army take-overs, but hand-overs to the army, when the army is used as a political sheet-anchor.

In the *Sudan* a simultaneous government, foreign policy and party crisis provoked the Prime Minister, formerly a brigadier in the Sudanese army, who also held the Defence portfolio, to ask the army commander, an associate since the Gallipoli campaign, to rescue the government from its opposition, by suspending Parliament and banning the parties. The result was not a reinforcement of the governing party by the army, but its displacement by a military junta. The junta ruled for six years, during which the army was rocked by three attempted coups within the officer corps, and was finally brought down by a combined assault of popular opposition and a fissure in the officer corps. In 1969 the same forces that had toppled the military junta used the coup d'etat to install themselves in power, with the proclaimed aim of using government to build a popular base of support.

In *Sierra Leone*, likewise, the army commander was called upon, by the prime minister defeated in an election, to impose martial law before the opposition leader and party could assume office. The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) had won the post-independence elections of 1962 under Sir Milton Margai's leadership; but after his death and the accession to the party leadership of his brother, Sir Albert Margai, the party declined in influence and in reputation, and was seriously challenged by the All Peoples' Congress (APC) of Siaka Stevens. As in the Sudan, the prime minister feared not only the defeat of his party, but with it his own political eclipse. As the elections approached, he tried various stratagems, including the proposal to establish a one-party state, and other constitutional changes which would have increased his executive powers; he also appointed as chief justice – the man who hears election complaints – a political associate. The polling was manipulated, just as the economic system had been, for the politicians in office; but the voting

results still showed a majority for the AP C. The governor-general had no sooner sworn in Siaka Stevens, than Sir Albert's friend and supporter in the army, Brigadier Lansana, tried to prop him up. This was a sheet-anchor action in the making; but inside the army, several of the brigadier's officers arrested him. Then, instead of installing the AP C, with Stevens as prime minister, the officers of the new junta dissolved the constitution, banned the parties and assumed power themselves, as the National Reformation Council (NRC). The move against Lansana had army, not party political, causes; but it soon enough produced political consequences.

Thirteen months later, the NRC was removed from office by a pay-strike type of coup from the ranks, with non-commissioned officers as spokesmen for the men. Apart from the Council's failures in government, the army itself was seething with discontent, directed at the officers as a whole, and at the ruling NRC in particular. The grievances were over pay and conditions and the inequalities between officers and men. Such are the discontents that stoke a pay strike, and when the soldiers acted it was exactly that; but it coincided with a countrywide resentment of the military junta, and a demand for the return to civilian rule. A group of perhaps a dozen, mostly privates but including a few non-commissioned officers, struck simultaneously at the Wilberforce barracks in Freetown and at Daru near the frontier, where there was a battalion detachment. The Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement emerged, to announce that it had arrested the entire officer corps, and that there was to be an immediate return to civilian rule, followed by an army pay increase. Not long after, Siaka Stevens was invited to form a government. In Sierra Leone a pay strike had ended the coup trajectory – that one, anyway – and led not to the installation of a military junta, but to a civilian regime.

In perhaps the largest number of coups, the army has extended its normal police-security function (for African armies are glorified para-military police forces) and has stepped down, as from Olympus, to settle conflict between parties and politicians and resolve a government crisis. But having entered the action as referee-or, in Nigeria, because army officers feared that the

military would be used as sheet-anchor on the wrong side – it has often remained in power for itself or on behalf of the groups it espoused.

In *Dahomey* there was an intense struggle among three political groups, organized round three political leaders, and with their political bases reinforced by regional-ethnic divisions between north and south and, in the south, east and west. By 1963 two of the three politicians, Hubert Maga and Migan Apithy, had managed to arrive at some sort of accommodation, but the third, Justin Ahomadegbe, was in detention for alleged plotting against the regime. Dahomey's economic position was precarious. Unemployment was endemic, and growing at an alarming rate, especially among civil servants and teachers. The civil service was swollen by the enforced repatriation of Dahomeyans from other African states and the cutback in France's African armies. Ahomadegbe had allied himself with the trade unions in the port of Cotonou, who deeply resented the political predominance of the capital, Porto Novo. (By 1957 there were estimated to be 22,000 wage-earners in Dahomey, of whom 7,000 were administrative employees in Porto Novo, and 13,000 employees in Cotonou factories or workers in the country's four oil mills.) The crisis was caused initially by the arrest of trade-union leaders, for demonstrating against the government, and especially against its attempts to control the unions. General Soglo, the army commander, stepped in to referee a government re-shuffle; but as the strike continued he felt impelled to assume executive responsibility himself, over a new triumvirate government comprising Apithy, Ahomadegbe and Maga. The general remained at the head of the provisional government for a few months and then formally withdrew in January 1964, handing power jointly to Apithy as president and head of state, and Ahomadegbe as vice-president. The unions had instigated the fall of one government, but they had to watch the army intervene because they themselves could not constitute any other. Two years later, at the end of 1965, the heads of government, working under a system of dual executive, were in fresh deadlock, and the army stepped in again. This time, in the face of growing restiveness among the young intellectuals, and among

civil servants – the civil service itself had grown from 22,000 in 1960 to 18,000 in 1965 – who were faced with salary cuts in the interests of austerity, the army set up a nine-man government of army men, technicians and one or two politicians. This was overseen by a National Renewal Committee of the military, technical experts, representatives of the unions and the youth and other interest groups. The leading politicians were in exile.

By mid-1967, however, the Soglo government was being criticized for the same deficiencies as its civilian predecessors. Soglo enjoyed the confidence of France, but the unions were once again organizing resistance to austerity cuts, and the budget deficit was larger than ever. In December 1967, during another bout of strikes, the army stepped in for the third time. Younger army officers dissolved General Soglo's government. The unions immediately presented their demands, among them the refund of a 25-per-cent reduction in their salaries. The middle-rank officers, who had mounted this latest coup, installed as head of state Colonel Alphonse Alley, formerly Soglo's chief-of-staff. A return to civilian rule through elections proved a fiasco, owing to a boycott, but the regime found a civilian head in a former politician, Dr Emile Zinsou. One of Zinsou's first decisions was to retire Colonel Alley and promote Major Kouandete to his post. In October 1969 the trial opened in Cotonou of Colonel Alley and others, charged with an attempted abduction of Major Kouandete. Successive referee actions had set off a pattern of military cannibalism in the army, where one commander devoured another.\*

In *Upper Volta* the army has been immune to inner-army strife. There, too, the army seized power during a showdown between the government of President Maurice Yameogo and the trade unions, and after conflict between political factions representing different regions. This was in January 1966, and the immediate cause of the discontent was a cutback in civil service salaries. The army was to hold the ring while the politicians negotiated a new coalition. But within a year Colonel Larnizana

• On 10 December 1969 a group of officers deposed President Zinsou. Lt.-Col. Maurice Kouandete, chief-of-staff and military commander of Cotonou, Dahomey's commercial capital, was believed to be behind this coup.

announced that military rule would continue for four years. Government was composed of seven military men and five civilians, with Lamizana as president and prime minister.

In the *Central African Republic*, Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokassa, army commander-in-chief, used the army to adjudicate the conflict between himself and the president, David Dacko, a close relative. Bokassa claimed as his justification for the seizure of power, the existence of a coup against the president and himself, and a Chinese plot against the country. The army government, he said, would 'abolish the bourgeoisie'. The political reasons for action, among them the need to pre-empt a radical coup, were extravagant; the effect of the coup was probably more minimal in the Central African Republic than anywhere else.

In *Burundi*, the young Jdng Ntare V dethroned his father Mwambutsa IV through a military coup in July 1966, and installed himself as head of state, with Captain Micombero as prime minister. Three months later, the premier deposed the nineteen-year-old king for his failure to keep his promises. A National Revolutionary Committee of army officers was created until a new government was formed. There had been a sequence of cabinet crises, political assassinations, plots and political executions over three years.

In *Nigeria*, too, though the reform declarations of the coup-makers suggested otherwise, the first coup of January 1966 cast the army essentially in the role of referee. The young officers were convinced that the army was about to be used by the politicians in power to reinforce their hold. The effect of throwing soldiers into the Western region, which was in a state of incipient civil war, would have been to strengthen a federal government based mainly on Northern power; the young majors intervened to adjudicate the contest in favour of the harassed opposition. The soldiers would have imposed an interim authority to bring Awolowo to power, they subsequently disclosed. Their declarations of reform were vague, if sincere, and though they admonished a class of corrupt politicians, they expressed no real alternative. (It was not the system that was wrong, but the men in power, one of the coup-makers later declared. <sup>5</sup>) In

any event, the coup lasted barely a week-end, not long enough to produce any alternative. It failed in a bid to take over the country and was smothered in a sheet-anchor counter-move by the army command under Ironsi. The army was then rapidly affected by the contagion of political division in the country, so that trends which had once resulted in constitutional, electoral and government deadlock became, in the hands of the soldiers, counter-coups for control – such as the coup from which the Gowon government emerged in July 1966 – armed clash and civil war.

Whether it enters as arbitrator or guardian of government, the army is liable to become a competitor for power. Sometimes the habit of power grows upon it in office; at other times its intervention in politics is immediately inspired by this purpose, especially if it sees its interests as coinciding with those of other groups that do not feel satisfactorily accommodated within the political system.

In *Congo-Brazzaville*, there was no military participation, only that of the police commander, in supplanting the government of Youlou by that of Masseмба-Debat in 1963. The initiative appeared to lie in the hands of the politicians backed by militant and radical-sounding youth and trade-unionists, organized in the union federations, in the youth section of the party, the National Movement of the Revolution (MNR) and in a civilian militia as a counter to the army. In 1966 an attempted army mutiny against the government was suppressed only with the help of Cuban army officers on secondment to help train the civil defence organization. Apart from this incipient conflict between army and party youth wing (throughout, the French retained their influence in the army; but the party and the youth section were forging links with Cuba, with China and the Soviet Union), there was another rift that ran through politics in Congo-Brazzaville. This was the division between Northern elements, strongly represented in the army (like the Kouyou people, from whose ranks rose young officers like Captain, later Major, Alfred Raoul, and Major Marien Ngouabi: alongside, incidentally, General Mobutu of Congo-Kinshasa, and General Bokassa of the Central African Republic); and the Bakongo,

especially the Lari, people of the South, round the capital, of which Massemba-Debat was a representative, as he was of the elite in the capital itself. In August 1968 the arrest of several leading supporters of Massemba-Debat was a prelude to the army take-over proper.

For some weeks there was a prolonged tussle for control of the capital between the party youth and the army. Massemba-Debat was eclipsed, first temporarily, and then permanently. The army emerged victorious. A new provisional government was established under the National Revolutionary Council, in which the army held three key positions, with Captain Alfred Raoul as prime minister, and Major Ngouabi as representing the real power of the army. Brazzaville Radio announced communiques setting up committees for the defence of the revolution, and suspending the party, its youth and women's organizations, and the trade-union federal councils. Soon, at the beginning of 1969, Ngouabi emerged formally as head of state, while remaining head of the armed forces. Pay increases of up to 40 per cent were announced for low-grade, and up to 20 per cent for middle-grade, civil servants. A cabinet reshuffle dropped the most important remaining Bakongo members of the government. A thousand members of the youth wing were officially incorporated into the regular army.

In Congo-Brazzaville, as in Algeria, the army saw itself as the more reliable revolutionary force. If Western-trained army officers are traditionally pro-West, not so Ngouabi, whose government was the first in Africa to recognize the government of the Viet Gong. Time will tell whether the radical pronouncements correspond with internal structural changes.

*Algeria's* road to independence, with the origins and inspiration of its army, was unique in the African experience. Algeria raised peasant-based forces that fought a gruelling war for seven years, setting a record for liberation by armed struggle without African parallel in the phase of decolonization. But after the crisis in the summer of 1962, post-independence Algerian politics resembled not the models of China, Vietnam and Cuba – of armed struggle from a guerrilla base liberating the rest of the country – but those of other newly independent states on the

continent. The war had produced not a unity between politics and the army fighting for liberation, nor even a united army, but several divided centres of power. The political leadership and the military were never integrated, as the guerrillas of Guine-Bissau insist that they must be, as an essential precondition of building not a professional, coup-making army, but a political movement of armed militants.<sup>6</sup> The FLN was the party for Algeria's liberation, embracing patriots of every political hue from moderate liberals to radical socialists. But when the government-in-exile was formed, it was reformist old-style politicians who negotiated the settlement with France, not the representatives of the militant forces in the interior. For these, in the *wilayas*, were cut off from one another at the height of the war, and from the army held in reserve over the frontier in friendly Maghreb countries; and no unified guerrilla base or leadership was ever built. By the time that independence was achieved, the army of the exterior was highly cohesive and organized; it not only absorbed or disbanded the *wilayas*, but was the force that backed Ben Bella to head the government over other contestants, and thus ruled, without coup d'etat, behind the scenes. The issue in the ensuing years remained the locality of political power in the new state. The FLN grew no grass-roots organization, and attempts to articulate the meaning and policy of the independence government floundered between contesting claims and vagueness of purpose. The primary cause of the coup d'etat led by the army chief-of-staff, Colonel Boumedienne, in mid-r965 was the attempt by Ben Bella to form a people's militia and solidify his political base as a counterpoise to the strength of the army. The principal justification of the army was the failure of government and the economy. Mter the coup, the role of the FLN was re-defined as one of elaboration, orientation, animation and control, but not of supremacy in the state. It was the army, through the Council of the Revolution, that was to be supreme.

Most of these coups d'etat have been 'palace' or political establishment revolutions, not social ones. They have changed personnel, shifted the balance in governments, arbitrated the claims of interest groups. The re-shufflings have been between

groups pivotal in the conduct of politics and the administration, but they have made no substantive changes in the direction of the economy, or the government's policies of social management. Between the army acting as sheet-anchor or as referee, there is a fine, barely visible line. The sheet-anchor action is generally initiated not by the army itself, but by government; by contrast, the coups which start as referee actions, to replace or to reprimand governments, are often staged by middle and younger officers (the young majors of Nigeria; the abortive attempt of the young lieutenants in Gabon). The army command tends to identify itself with the government ushered in to office with independence; the younger officers question the record of such government, and champion other aspirants, and their own army grievances often coincide with political discontents. In the coups where the army acts as a competitor for power, it often proclaims more revolutionary purpose than the government shows ability to pursue; yet the test of its purpose lies not in the proclamation, but in the army's ability to formulate alternative strategies and corresponding social instruments.

There are coups d'etat that serve as levers for change, or against it. In *Egypt*, now the United Arab Republic, the Free Officers destroyed a corrupt and failing palace-aristocracy; and although the initial action had not calculated on far-reaching social change, or even the continuance of the officers in government, they soon felt themselves impelled, for domestic, social and foreign policy reasons, to institute land reform and nationalization, alongside an endeavour to build a popular political base. And in this last, Egypt's army has revealed most glaringly the intrinsic limitations of professional armies in politics and government.

In *Libya*, in September 1969, the army removed a feudal monarchy and promised a passage to the Egyptian model. In the *Sudan* the young officer coup of 1969 wrenched power not from a feudal-based aristocracy but from traditional political parties enmeshed in sectarian religious politics. These armies pledged a transformation of the economic and social structures in their countries, through state action dominated by themselves.

In both *Ghana* and *Mali*, the army – together with the police

force in Ghana – acted to reverse reforms that the Nkrumah and Modibo Keita regimes had tried, however unsuccessfully, to set in motion. The coups revealed in one stroke the fatal weaknesses of these regimes : while they were committed to initiating economic undertakings that would break with the old colonial dependence, and would induce far-reaching changes in the social structure, the changes themselves had been insufficient to alter the fundamental character of the state or the political party. These systems showed no more resilience under attack from their armies than have half a dozen feeble, divided elite-run states. At the same time, changes induced by the army junta and *its* civilian base, certainly in Ghana, as soon as power was seized, were sufficiently removed, in declaration and purpose, and in long-term effect on the economy, to characterize these coups as levers to reverse change. Nkrumah had not found a strategy for African development, let alone for socialism; but the Ghanaian coup d'etat – like the one to come in Mali – was calculated to prevent any such prospect.

## **Coups that Failed**

In *Ethiopia*, the coup that failed in 1960 has been called both the first real attempt at social revolution there,<sup>7</sup> and a typical palace putsch.<sup>8</sup> The principal conspirators were the commander of the Imperial Bodyguard, Brigadier-General Mengistu Neway, and his younger brother, Girmame, an enlightened provincial governor; and they were joined by the head of the security service and the police commissioner, and supported, once the coup was under way, by demonstrations of university students (although, from among the graduate elite of four to five hundred in Ethiopia, only a handful were known to be fully committed in the preparation of the coup).<sup>9</sup> The coup reflected the conflict between the traditional nobility and the newer, larger Western-educated groups 'whose initiatives were blocked in a palace world of court political intrigues'.<sup>10</sup> The coup-makers proclaimed a reform government; yet they failed signally to find a firm base of support, and they fell back on traditional ones –

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the crown prince, *in* whose name their proclamation was announced, noblemen, the military leadership – in order to justify and confirm their seizure of power. The coup was defeated militarily because it was staged by the Imperial Guard alone; and countervailing military forces, in the shape of the army, the territorial force and the air force, were mobilized, with the help of United States military and diplomatic advice, until the dynastic power bases of the imperial regime, not least the Church, could re-assert themselves.

In *Senegal*, in 1962, a long-standing political conflict between President Senghor and his prime minister, Mamadou Dia, led to an attempted coup by the latter. The army was divided. The commander-in-chief supported Dia; the paratroop commander, Jean Diallo, threw his forces behind the president. The support of the paratroops was decisive. Senghor frustrated the coup and had Dia and his supporters arrested. The paratroop commander became head of the armed forces.

In *Gabon*, in 1964, French army intervention restored the government of President Leon M'ba, after a coup d'etat had achieved power for just under two days. The coup-makers were young lieutenants, who constituted themselves the Revolutionary Committee. They had begun to install a different government, headed by the former Foreign Minister, Jean Hilaire Aubame, whom the former United States Ambassador to Gabon is only too willing to describe as pro-American and were broadcasting in the streets of the capital, Libreville: 'A peaceful revolution has just been accomplished. We ask foreigners, including the technical advisers, not to worry.'<sup>13</sup> The French Ambassador bent to the task of trying to negotiate the release of M'ba and a compromise government that would accommodate all factions. The French government had other plans. General Kergaravat, commander of the French Forces of the Second African Zone, had been alerted at his headquarters in Brazzaville. ('A group of Frenchmen sent the appeal to de Gaulle,' according to one observer.)<sup>14</sup> A French troop airlift went rapidly into action. Forces were called in from the Central African Republic and from Dakar in Senegal, until there was a build-up of some 600 French troops. According to the American Ambassador, from

the time that General Kergaravat arrived in Libreville until he left Gabon forty-eight hours later, the French Ambassador was out of touch with his government; the Elysee was communicating directly with the general. In Gabon, after the restoration of President M'ba, crowds stoned American cars and accused the CIA of instigating the coup to put their protege Aubarne in office.<sup>15</sup>

After the French Cabinet meeting at which the Gabon intervention was discussed, M. Alain Peyrefitte, Minister of Information, declared: 'It is not possible to leave a few machine-gun carriers free to seize at any time a Presidential Palace, and it is precisely because such a threat was foreseen and foreseeable that the new-born states signed agreements with France to guard against such risks.' The Minister disclosed that France had intervened ten times under these agreements since 1960.

## I. THE SUDAN

### The General Changes Hats

The Sudanese Parliament had been precipitately adjourned in November 1958, at the height of a crisis over the acceptance of United States aid. The morning it was due to re-assemble, the country found itself under the control of a military government – the second, after Egypt, in Africa. 4,000 troops had been moved into the capital on the authority of the commander-in-chief, General Ibrahim Abboud. The country, he said in his first broadcast, had been in a state of degeneration. Chaos and national instability, which prevailed among individuals and the community alike, had spread into all government machinery and public utilities without exception, as a result of which the nation was gradually being dragged to disaster. 'Praise be to Allah that your loyal army has today . . . carried out a peaceful move which it is hoped will be the turning point towards stable and clean administration.' General Abboud, as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, headed a Council of Ministers of eight army men and five civilians, and a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, of the same eight army men together with five others.

Nine years later, Abdallah Khalil had a touching if unconvincing version of his last day as prime minister. The afternoon before the coup, he told me, he had been due to give a lecture at the military college. 'My subject was "The Spirit of the Soldier". I went to deliver the lecture, but no officers came. Perhaps they were too busy preparing for the next day.'<sup>2</sup> This defiance of army regulations was dismissed with surprising lightness by the man who had lived his life by army discipline. Abdallah Khalil had spent thirty-two years and two world wars in the army. He was commissioned in the Sudanese battalions of the Egyptian army after joining in 1910 and serving at Gallipoli, and in 1967 was still able animatedly to recall the

Dardanelles campaign. In the Second World War, he saw action in Ethiopia, and by his retirement in 1942 was the first Sudanese to reach the rank of brigadier or Miralai. 'I like the army,' he confided. 'You know what you're doing. You know where you are with the army.' This was a strange statement from the man who eased the army into power in the Sudan when he could not impose his policies and his premiership in any other way, only to find that his army-holding rescue operation developed overnight a power structure of its own, which jettisoned his place in the post-coup government, and, subsequently, even imprisoned him.

For, after a decade, several governments and much probing and reconstruction of events, it is clear that the coup in the Sudan, far from being a take-over of power by the army, was a hand-over to the army. It was a coup by courtesy, set afoot by an army commander and his senior aides in response to the demand for emergency measures by the head of government. The premier was losing his grip on his coalition, his party and his office as premier. He used his post as Minister of Defence to assert military compulsion where political solutions had not worked. Abdallah Khalil's various public and private explanations were inconsistent, where they were not patently shifty, as in the evidence he gave before the official Inquiry into the coup.\* The account that he gave, whitewashing his own role, squared not at all with the evidence of the army participants in the coup, or with the sequence of events.

The coup was a talking point in the Three Towns † several weeks before it occurred. Abdallah Khalil made it clear that he regarded the rejection of United States aid by MPs as mutiny.‡:

*"Inquiry into the Causes of the 17 November 1958 Coup, conducted by the Attorney-General's Office under the Sudan Penal Code, January 1965, hereafter referred to as the Inquiry. The report of the Inquiry is in Arabic.*

†The Three Towns comprise Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman, all contiguous.

‡:Abdallah Khalil's evidence to the *Inquiry into the Causes of the 17 November 1958 Coup*. Among those questioned about their part in the coup were Generals Abboud, Wahab and Hassan Beshir, as well as Zein Abdin Salehm, a retired army officer. For the most part the examination was not searching nor intensive enough to prevent evasion and vagueness on the part of witnesses.

# SUDAN



He threatened that if the politicians failed, he could resort to other forces, and rumour was rife that he was planning to call on the army.\* He sounded out the Speaker of the House a month before the coup about proclaiming a state of emergency, but was advised that neither Parliament nor the Supreme Council would allow it.<sup>3</sup> A Communist Party leaflet circulated a fortnight before the coup warned that 'democracy is in danger and might be replaced by a military dictatorship'. *Al Ayyam* columns were voicing disquiet at suspicious developments behind the scenes. The day before the army acted, Abdel Khalek Mahgoub, the Communist Party secretary-general, urged Azhari to issue a public warning of an imminent military intervention, but the NUP leader refused. Diplomatic wires were also humming with official and unofficial reports that an army coup was on the way in the Sudan. Abdallah Khalil confided in Haile Selassie,<sup>4</sup> his friend and associate from Second World War field-campaigns in Ethiopia; the news travelled on the diplomatic grapevine from the Emperor to the British embassy in Addis Ababa, and thence to the British and Ethiopian embassies in Khartoum.

It was clear that the Umma-PDP coalition was too far eroded to survive the forthcoming session of Parliament. The PDP tactics of non-cooperation endangered the working of the United States aid agreement to which the Umma Party was

\* Under cross-examination at the Inquiry, Abdallah Khalil said: 'After some time there was the latest rumour that the army was planning a coup, and I heard this rumour like others did, by hearsay and not in any formal or official way. I did not investigate the rumour although I was the Minister of Defence. For one thing, I did not hear officially . . . and anyway it wasn't possible for me to stop the army because the coup was ready.'

P. M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan* (London, 1961), p. 184, reports a conversation which Abdallah Khalil is said to have had with General Abboud on 20 November and a statement after 26 November that he was aware of what was going on in military circles.

Abu Rannat, Chief Justice under the Khalil government and one of the civilian pillars of the Abboud military regime, told the writer: 'Tacit agreement for the army to step in had been reached in discussions over some weeks. The matter had been ventilated. It was known from discussions that the army would be welcome. The error of the army was not to plan exactly how to intervene, and at what point to hand over again.'

committed. Umma leaders also made no secret of their ambition to have Sayid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi declared president of the Republic; the PDP calculated that an UMMA-Ansar president would make them very much the junior partner of the coalition both in fact and in the eyes of Egypt, so it was scarcely surprising that the PDP obstructed more energetically than ever. The Umma Party saw this as urgent, for Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi's health was reported by his doctors to be failing; but Umma eagerness to settle the issue was rivalled only by PDP perversity in prolonging it. The alternative was for the Umma Party to find a new partner in coalition. But to Abdallah Khalil, whose hostility to Egypt and Egyptian influences had first been incited during the Abd al-Latif mutiny and had not subsided in thirty years, an association with the NUP and an accommodation with Azhari were unthinkable. The coalition with the PDP had been possible only because Abdallah Khalil had a working relationship with Sayid Ali al-Mirghani, whom he had tried, unsuccessfully, to prevail upon to dismiss Ali Abd al-Rahman as party leader, and because the two Sayids had produced a common declaration of purpose in their mutual desire to break Azhari.

Other events added to the pressure on Khalil. Government had been rendered unworkable by the conflict inside the coalition, and now the same problem provoked a split inside the Umma Party itself, with Abdallah Khalil and Siddiq al-Mahdi, the son of Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, in heated contest over whether the NUP was acceptable as a coalition partner. The dispute was taken for mediation to Sayid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi who, on constitutional grounds, threw his support behind Abdallah Khalil as leader of the party in government and its secretary-general.<sup>5</sup> In fervent disagreement but unwilling to challenge his father's authority, Siddiq left the country for Switzerland. By then, however, Umma negotiations with the NUP had already been initiated; and among important members of the party, there was every expectation that, when Parliament assembled, it would be controlled by an Umma-NUP coalition, without Abdallah Khalil. The Umma Party leader who, on the afternoon before the coup, took the prime minister a copy of the

plan for a new partnership in government, found him closeted in his office with the Chief Justice, Abu Rannat, who was to be one of the two civilians on whom the military government would lean. The NUP-Umma coalition was ready, men of influence in the Umma Party said, 'but Abdallah Khalil betrayed us'.

Azhari, himself, was meanwhile engaged in a double set of calculations. He was negotiating a coalition with the Umma representatives on the one hand, and on the other was taking soundings with the PDP. Azhari and a small group of party associates had travelled to Iraq during the parliamentary recess, to congratulate General Kassem on his successful coup. On the way there and back, they had spent brief periods in Cairo. Also in the Egyptian capital at the time had been the leader of the PDP, Abd al-Rahman. In Umma circles, Azhari's visit to Iraq was seen as a way of being innocently in Egypt at the same time as the leader of the PDP. The latter asserted that he had gone to Cairo because Sayid Ali al-Mirghani wanted the way prepared for a settlement of the Nile waters dispute. In the course of this mission, the PDP delegation was received by Nasser, Zakariah Mohieddin and the Egyptian Minister of Agriculture. Azhari denied emphatically <sup>6</sup> that the simultaneous presence in Cairo of himself and the PDP leader – and the arrival of Sayid Ali al-Mirghani – was anything but coincidental. At the time, however, Yusuf Mustafa al-Tinay, the Sudanese ambassador in Cairo, and one-time editor of the Umma Party organ, was drawing his own conclusions. Intelligence reports submitted to Khartoum and press coverage of Sudanese comings and goings in Cairo could be relied upon to play on more than only Abdallah Khalil's deep-set fears of Egyptian intervention, Less personal but scarcely less crucial were the susceptibilities of United States foreign policy, with its penchant for military men and military machines as more malleable and understandable than Third World political forces, and its revulsion for both NUP and PDP policies, with their hint of Nasserist influence.

The Umma Party, up to now undivided, began to develop schisms. Some members of the party's parliamentary group expressed public dissent with Khalil's policies, and a meeting

of youth activists and some MPs passed a vote of censure on the prime minister. The Umma group that opposed US aid was accused by the traditionalists in the party of being Egyptian agents. Popular pressures were rising to the point where none of the parties and no new government could totally discount the demand for a rupture with existing foreign policy commitments. National Front committees were being formed in the provinces, on the initiative, chiefly, of the Communist Party (which was illegal, but operated more or less openly as the Anti-Imperialist Front) for a swing to the left,<sup>7</sup> with cooperation of all left forces inside and outside the parties. The politicians were still preoccupied with manoeuvres at the top; but rank-and-filers, especially in the PDP, in the trade unions, among the students and the Gezira tenants, were campaigning for more fundamental political realignments. They demanded the 'regain-ing of sovereignty by the abrogation of the American aid agreement' and the 'abolition of the feudal system and its economic base', as well as a 'national democratic constitution that guaranteed the full participation of patriotic forces'. The surge of popular pressure was prompted by the spreading conviction that the politicians and the parliamentary system had squandered the country's independence hopes.

By 13 November, United States policy-makers in the area appeared to have convinced themselves that an Egyptian take-over of the Sudan government was imminent. This was based largely on a cannily timed announcement by a prominent NUP leader that an NUP-PDP coalition was certain. This had deliberately been leaked to speed the still slow progress of Umma-NUP negotiations.<sup>8</sup> But this news had exactly the opposite effect to what had been intended, for it prompted Abdallah Khalil to execute his own contingency plan. By now, any objection from Britain or the United States to an army action had been either neutralized in the interests of achieving government 'stability', or enthusiastically dropped in the interest of containing Egypt and its conspiracies, real or imaginary, against the Sudan. When the time came for the army to play its part, there was the reasonably sound assurance that, even if they indicated no public approval, the two major powers

with interests in this area of Africa would look kindly on the actions of the military.<sup>9</sup>

Abdallah Khalil had begun sounding out close army associates two months before the army stepped in. A few days before the move, General Abboud, army commander-in-chief, convened a meeting of the senior army officers in Khartoum to discuss the premier's request that the army intervene to ensure stability in the country. The army attitude varied. Major-General Abd al-Wahhab, the army's strong man and second-in-command, was Abdallah Khalil's relative, had also been his ward and protege since he had been enrolled at cadet school, and was a strong Umma supporter. If one crutch of an Umma coalition fell away, the army would make an alternative prop. General Abboud took the same conveniently confused view as did his head of government. Of course, an army move meant that he who had been badgering the Ministry of Finance to finalize his pension had to postpone his imminent retirement; but he accepted this with the good grace of any well-trained army man. Others of the generals felt that the army had to act to pre-empt a move by more junior officers.<sup>10</sup> But whatever they thought at the time about their intervention, the army commanders subsequently explained themselves as having responded to a military command that had to be executed without question. It had been issued from head of government to commander-in-chief of the army, and so on down the command structure.

The inside planning of the army move looked very much like the work of General Wahhab and Brigadier Hassan Beshir Nasr. The latter said that he had three weeks in which to prepare army dispositions in the Three Towns.<sup>11</sup> The declaration, on the prime minister's orders, of a twenty-four-hour state of emergency for the re-opening of Parliament pointedly set the timing of the operation, and gave the army the cover that it required under army regulations for emergency standby. The official excuse was that security forces were being alerted in case of rioting on the resumption of Parliament. In fact, this was the screen that the army used to assemble in barracks on the night of 16 November, guns at the ready. They moved into action

at 2 A.M., according to careful pre-arranged headquarters planning.

Ali Abd al-Rahman, the PDP leader, U paid a courtesy, or curiosity, call on Abdallah Khalil immediately after the coup. Khalil said, to the considerable consternation of Umma associates present: 'Don't worry. Nothing has changed. Politics will go on as they are. Tomorrow you will hear on the radio that there will be a new government, and a new Council of Ministers. Azhari and I will be in the Supreme Council, and some of our big officers in the Council. The parties and Umma politics will continue.' To Abdallah Khalil, the coup was to be the continuation of his politics by other means. It was some days before the irony of the situation sank in. Abdallah Khalil, the pillar of British establishment traditions in the Sudan, pioneer member of the advisory council, of the legislative council and then of Parliament, who had climbed all the carefully placed rungs to self-government and independence, had used a British-trained army to dismantle the whole structure -and with it the generally accepted British army tradition that soldiers do not meddle in politics. And all this had been done only to have his own army then evict him from the new authority that he had himself tried to establish.

Whether or not there was a formal or gentlemen's agreement among Generals Abboud, Wahhab and Hassan Beshir on the one hand, and Abdallah Khalil on the other, it was unquestionably a shock to the deposed premier when he learned, on the day of the coup, that far from acting to reinforce his authority, the army was distributing ministries to army officers, and setting up a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that would consist of army men alone.

Not that the army on the day of the coup gave the impression that it knew where it was going. The operation itself went off without loss of life, with almost ostentatious politeness, and without round-ups at all; there were only letters of dismissal from office and a brief period of house arrest for the leading politicians. Within hours of the take-over, the army was brandishing a message from the head of each of the two sects 'blessing' the new government. From Sayid Ali al-Mirghani, the blessing

came with some warmth, probably because Abdallah Khalil had given him some prior inkling of developments, and because his PDP, like Abdallah Khalil, stood to lose from an Umma-NUP coalition. Sayid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi's message implied certain reservations, but a strong hint that acceptance would be the smoothest path to civil peace.

At army headquarters, a flurried series of consultations began, as the generals cast about for their course of action. No senior civil servant appeared to question the authority of the new masters; and, indeed, for some while after the coup, it was not certain who they were. At least one important member of the army senior command did not know that the army had taken power: when a civilian reported to Major General Mohammed Talaat Farid, in charge of the Southern Command at Juba, that he had heard the broadcast of an army take-over from Radio Omdurman, Farid had the man thrown into jail for spreading rumours and undermining confidence.

In the period between the troop movements a few hours after midnight and the broadcast of the military take-over, Generals Abboud and Wahhab had been paying urgent calls. One of their visits was to Abu Rannat, the Chief Justice, who agreed to continue in that post. The second philosopher-guide of the army command was Ahmed Kheir. A lawyer like Abu Rannat, he had been one of the founders of the Graduates' Congress, and much admired by the independence student generation. But quarrelsome and hypercritical of his fellow-politicians who had excluded him from office, he had broken with them and retired from active political life. General Wahhab called on Ahmed Kheir for a legal consultation. What would he advise, he was asked, about the dissolution of Parliament and the installation of a new regime? These, Ahmed Kheir replied, were matters not of procedure, but of policy. His impression of this first consultation with the army general was that a civilian Supreme Council was about to be nominated which would include Azhari, representatives of the Mahdi and Mirghani families, a Southerner and Abdallah Khalil.<sup>3</sup> But later in the day, when the generals returned for a fresh bout of advice, they had changed their plans. The military alone were to comprise the Supreme Council.

Twelve officers, under General Abboud as president, were decreed the supreme constitutional authority in the Sudan; and to General Abboud were formally delegated all legislative, judicial and executive powers, as well as the command of the armed forces. The army invited Ahmed Kheir to become one of five civilian ministers who, together with seven army men on the Supreme Council, would comprise a Council of Ministers. He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. Among the five civilian ministers, two had been Umma members of the Khalil cabinet: Ziada Osman Arbab, the Minister of Education; and a Southerner, Santino Deng, the Minister of Animal Resources.

## **The Brigadiers' Mutiny**

The initial popular reaction to the coup was relief that the politicians were at last out of the way. For many people, military rule evoked the examples of Egypt and Iraq, where radical officers had removed corrupt politicians at gunpoint. But as the months passed, and the country and the army took a closer look at the shape of the new authority, there was serious disquiet.

The seizure of power by the small group of senior officers in Khartoum had been swift and effortless. Organized political opposition on a number of fronts under the leadership of left-wing forces would in time pierce the myth of the army regime's invincibility, but this needed time to gather strength. What the top army command did not bargain for were the fissures in its own ranks. These opened in the inner circle that was the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, through the hostility between Abd al-Wahhab and Hassan Beshir; and in the army at large, following the exclusion from the inner circle of several important members of the army hierarchy, who suspected political reasons for their being kept out. Combinations of career rivalry, the cleavage in sect allegiances and the conflicting politics of different army generations made for a turbulent first year of army rule;

and helped, in the convulsive last days of the regime, to topple the army government from power.

The NUP-Umma and Ansar-Khatmiyya conflict soon rose to the surface. From its beginnings, the army and the police force had been largely Khatmiyya-based. Among the Khatmiyya, the Shaigia, whose military prowess had given the Egyptian Khedive some considerable trouble, were particularly well represented in the army, and in its top command, through General Abboud himself and Hassan Beshir.

The army take-over had been managed by a small group of officers in Khartoum. Suspicions that the army was being used for Umma political ends stirred in Brigadier Mohieddin Abdallah, the commander of the eastern area, who was a strong NUP supporter; for he was neither consulted about the coup nor included in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, although senior in rank to one of its members. Abdallah Khalil's role in the master-minding of the coup, and the dominating heights held in army and government by Abdallah Khalil's protege, Abdul Wahhab; the presence among the five civilian ministers of two members of the former Umma cabinet; and the pro-Umma imbalance in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, combined to alert Mohieddin and his friend Brigadier Abd al-Rahim Shannan, commander of the Northern area, and a strong PDP man. Not four months after General Abboud and his Council had installed themselves, these two senior army commanders staged a march on Khartoum, followed by a second, two days later, and yet another, two months later. Brigadier Abd al-Rahim Shannan of the Northern Shendi command stormed the capital with a company of fresh recruits, not one of whom had yet fired a rifle, though he could have drawn on two well-equipped and seasoned battalions. This gesture of bravado was intended to humiliate Abboud, and was said to be typical of an officer known for his reckless panache. The troop moves on the capital were ordered under cover of movements from the Northern and Eastern commands to take up active service in the South. The insurgent troops cordoned off army headquarters and arrested General Wahhab, together with two of his supporting colonels, whose place in the Supreme Council was viewed as a token of

their Umma political allegiance and not of their army seniority. Sensitive of his precarious hold, General Abboud sought the mediation of Abdallah Khalil and of the two sect leaders. Mohieddin and Sharman released Wahhab and the colonels after having secured a promise that their forceful representations would be considered. They then took their troops back to their commands.

Two days later, on 4 March, they were back in Khartoum to reinforce their case and to avert action against them. Claiming to speak for the young officers, and playing on the Neguib-Nasser parallel, they alleged a conspiracy against Abboud by Wahhab, and maintained that their 4 March movement was to 'protect the gains achieved by the revolution of November 17'.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after, it was announced that all the members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces had resigned, and that a meeting of officers was in progress in the Ministry of Defence, summoned for consultation.<sup>15</sup> Fifteen commands took part in an unprecedented election of a new Supreme Council. Mohieddin, always a popular officer, polled fifteen votes; Abboud, fourteen; Hassan Beshir, number two man of the Supreme Council, only nine. Wahhab, too, was re-elected; but he refused to join a Supreme Council with rebel members, whose troops had not returned to their bases, and he was dropped from both the Council and his ministerial office, to retire with a pension and a grant of 3,000 acres of state land.<sup>16</sup> The day after his resignation, the press carried a delicately framed news item - 'It is officially announced that all troops from provincial units who stopped for a few days in Khartoum have now returned to their posts.'<sup>17</sup>

As a member of the Supreme Council, Sharman demanded the release or trial of trade-unionists held in prison, among them four officials of the Sudan Federation of Trade Unions. He also pressed for the reinstatement of nineteen officers dismissed from the army following the Kibaida coup. But his advocacy of these causes was to be of brief duration. By the second half of May, the army was in fresh convulsions. The supporters of Shannan and Mohieddin in the provincial commands - chiefly the heads of Gedaref and Shendi, their own previous commands - felt

that the March victory against the old-guard officers had not been carried far enough. Hassan Beshir was their main target. This time, however, Mohieddin and Shannan did not move in concert, and Shannan's followers appear to have precipitated him into an action about which he was dubious. The Eastern command moved, but not the Northern. When a new commander was sent to Gedaref, he was arrested by the acting commander, who moved two battalions to Khartoum; but Hassan Beshir acted promptly to send the troops back to Gedaref and to arrest the chief organizers. By ■ June, Shannan and Mohieddin were themselves under arrest. Three weeks later, they and fourteen other officers faced a court martial, charged with inciting a mutiny.

During the trial, Shannan developed a vigorous defence of what he called the aims of the 4 March movement. They were, he said, to ascertain that Abboud would continue to be president; to stop foreign interference, through Wahhab, and thwart a plot to make the Sudan depart from her policy of positive neutrality; to solve the outstanding issues between the Sudan and the United Arab Republic; to achieve close cooperation of the government with the people; to promote the standard of living in the Sudan, and to make national welfare and prosperity a reality. He told the court of the occasion in May 1958 when he had been at Halayib on the north-east border *with* Egypt, and Abdallah Khalil had arrived in the company of two Americans to inspect an air strip. Snatches of their conversation had been overheard by Shannan and had aroused his suspicion – reinforced by an instruction in December 1958 to build a road in the area – that Abdallah Khalil planned to allow foreign military bases in the Sudan. The plot which the 4 March movement had been designed to stop was the forced retirement of General Abboud, to allow Abdallah Khalil's protege and Umma colleague Wahhab to take over. 'We found ourselves driven by patriotism to save the Sudan. Hence the March 4 movement.'<sup>18</sup> Shannan and Mohieddin were sentenced to death; but this was commuted to life imprisonment. (They served barely more than five years; their punishment was interrupted by the events of October 1964.)

The two coups caused a major change in the structure of army and government. After May, all the members of the Supreme Council, with the exception of Generals Abboud and Hassan Beshir, received their army pensions and were retired from active service and command. Army officers were prohibited from calling on ministers in their government offices. Rather belatedly, thus, an attempt was made to stop members of the Supreme Council from using their army commands in bids for power.

The next blow struck from inside the army against the army command came from the ranks of the junior officers. Numbers of young officers had been expelled from the army in the wake of the Shannan-Mohieddin coups and, further back, after the Kibaida attempt; others, not yet exposed for their participation in any of these actions, were increasingly critical of a military regime that, far from curing the country of the disputes and divisions of the politicians, was inflicting them on the Sudan in an intensified form. By the second year of the military regime, the paint of the army's promises to bring stability was peeling fast. The officers who met in secret to plan the next coup, though unclear about ways and means, talked of the return to civil rule: but not a return to power of the former discredited parties and politicians; rather, a government of selected politicians that would be committed to work within the framework of a national charter, with both government and charter to be supported by the army. It would have to be a reformed army, of course. And who were the politicians to be? Some members of the group plumped for independents. Others found some leaders of the parties acceptable, among them the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahgoub. Others had confidence in – and, indeed, the leader of the group was himself related to – Mirghani Hamza. The name of Dardieri Mohammed Osman was also mentioned. Both Osman and Hamza were men of considerable influence in the country, loyal to the Mirghani house and its leaning towards Egypt. Aims and planning were still at an early, tentative stage. In the course of two months, several dates were fixed for action and then, for one reason or another, cancelled as unsuitable. In Khartoum garrison and the infantry school at Omdur-

man about thirty officers were involved in the planning of the coup, as well as others in the Central, Eastern and Western commands, and in the tank corps.

The defeat of this coup was unwittingly prepared in an early approach made by the leader, Colonel Ali Hamid, to two young non-commissioned officers of the Western command in charge of a company at Omdurman. 'If,' Ali Hamid asked them, 'we were one day to send an officer to move the company for an operation unknown at headquarters, what would your reaction be?' 'We would agree,' the Ncos said.<sup>19</sup> But one of them reported the conversation to Deputy Commander Hassan Beshir at headquarters. Ali Hamid was watched. He was also called before Hassan Beshir and warned that his involvement in a conspiracy was known. A meeting of the planners held immediately after the warning discussed the seriousness of the leak. The majority concluded that, while Beshir knew something was afoot, he had very little detail and no inkling of the plan's dimensions. They agreed to persist. A final date for the coup was fixed.

The night before the action, Ali Hamid addressed the officers of the infantry school at Omdurman and the battalion as a whole. He needed their help, he said, in a plan to bring down the Abboud regime. Soldiers were Sudanese citizens whose country and army were being dragged through the mud by corrupt generals. The army had to act to restore its own reputation. Those, he said, who wished to restore the reputation of the army, 'Take three steps forward'. The entire battalion moved forward.<sup>20</sup> It was to provide the manpower for the following day's action, under the leadership of Captain Hamid Abd al-Magid, who happened to be a son-in-law of coup-maker Brigadier Sharman.

The plan was a simple one. Ali Hamid's infantry school battalion was dispatched with orders to capture the two bridges commanding the entrance to the capital, to take the broadcasting station and to arrest the members of the Supreme Council. Ali Hamid himself went to mobilize a company of the Khartoum garrison. *But* instead of joining in the action, the sergeants and other non-commissioned officers of this company placed the

coup-leader under arrest. This was not known for several crucial hours by the other members of the conspiracy. And the plan misfired fatally in another direction, too. Hoping for a swift seizure of control, the planners relied on arresting the members of the Supreme Council. But perhaps as a result of noticing abnormal movement in Khartoum garrison and the infantry school, perhaps in a state of general alert as a result of the earlier tip-off, the members of the Supreme Council had gathered secretly at headquarters on the night of the coup to plan their own moves. With the failure to round-up the Supreme Council and in the absence of Colonel Ali Hamid's leadership, the conspiracy began to flounder. Though some of its command was hesitant, the tank corps had been expected to join in the coup; but the Supreme Council, through General Awad Abd al-Rahman, acted to prevent this. Several officers suspected of sympathy with the coup, as a result of previous association with the Shannan-Mohieddin actions, were arrested. When the tanks moved on Khartoum that night, they came not to make but to break the conspiracy.

The court martial that followed a week later placed eleven officers on trial. Five of seven officers convicted were sentenced to death; among these were Ali Hamid and Abd al-Hamid Abd al-Magid, the son-in-law of Shannan.

The execution of the Ali Hamid conspirators did a good deal to dispel the illusion that army rule brought 'stability' in its wake. Most susceptible to the notion that a strong arm gets things done had been the civil servants, so close to the generation of politicians who had proved so inept and unprincipled. Military men were expected to be plain but decisive, to import army precision into government business, and to give due weight to the specialist advice of civil servants frustrated by the squabbles and irrelevancies of previous governments. To many in the service, the prospect that they would at last come into their own, with the rulers ready to rely on the only elite really trained to govern – their assumption being that government consisted of nothing more than efficient administration – was definitely cheering. If there were any doubts over whether armies were fit to rule, they were not expressed in the early days. It was a relief

to get rid of the politicians; and, where there might have been misgivings, it seemed judicious not to provoke armed men. In any event, the civil service seemed unaware that in the early shaky period of this, or any other, army regime, the military needed the civil service more than the other way about.

The service was newly entrenched: 8po posts had been filled when senior British civil servants were displaced in the independence rush to decolonize. The new men basked in a pre-independence salary rise, instituted for the benefit of expatriate officials on their way out, which swallowed practically the entire surplus of the independence year cotton crop. Impatient to get on with their well-paid jobs, the civil servants accepted the new beads of government without question, and by their uninterrupted working of the administrative machine, put the seal of authority on the coup. Governors in the provinces with provincial armies at their command; the permanent secretary at the Ministry of the Interior, with power to summon the security council to confront the army; the Department of Justice which controlled the police: none of these seemed to have any conception of, or were willing to exercise, their ability to challenge the legitimacy of the take-over. Nor did they question the powers of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces which, from the outset, monopolized the formulation of policy and made the Council of Ministers a mere cipher. The ministers, the five civilians among them, were heads of departments; but any issues of importance—and many of apparent unimportance—were decided by the Supreme Council,\* without reference to the Council of Ministers. This was left to handle routine duties, like the consideration of departmental memoranda. Government in the Sudan, it was generally believed, was conducted by four men—General Abboud and General Hassan Beshir, and lawyers Ahmed Kheir and Abu Rannat—with other rulers, whether military or civilian, as mere executors.

At first the civil service hope that clean and efficient administration would come into its own seemed to be realized. Memoranda were handled with greater speed, decisions taken with less

\*Even scholarship awards had to be approved by the Supreme Council.

procrastination. But 'after a while,' said a leading civil servant, 'the army gave us their back'. A state of conflict between junta and civil servants was formally recognized by the amendment of the Civil Service Pensions Act in 1962. It provided for the retirement of any civil servant, 'if recommended by the Minister concerned as being in the interests of the service, and approved by the Council of Ministers'. Several top administrators were forcibly retired under this section 32b, among them a provincial governor. But civil service conflicts with the military reached crisis in only a small minority of cases. In the main, the attitude of the civil administrators was one of smug passivity, of letting the army men commit blunders on their own. It would not be for too long, after all. Had the junta not promised a return to barracks in six months, a year, perhaps two years? By its own declarations the military government was guarding the national interest through a difficult period, when it was necessary for some force to hold the ring until a return could safely be made to a reformed parliamentary system. Meanwhile, the civil service would carry on.

It had little option, it supposed. The army had seized control of the power to command. Indeed, what civil servants principally resented was interference with the administrative chain of command. Reverting to the days of Kitchener and Wingate, the junta appointed provincial military governors as their direct representatives. Two systems were expected to function side by side: the military administration taking instructions direct from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces; and the civil administration functioning under the Ministry of Interior. Depending on the assertiveness or self-effacement of the particular civilian governor, the operation of two parallel but separate systems of control produced conflict or hesitancy, and underlying paralysis on the part of the civilian system. In fact, said one governor, the military had scrapped the civil administration without knowing it. The parallel system dismantled the authority of the civil administration, interfered with a working system and atrophied any civilian initiative. 'Whenever something went wrong,' said one governor, 'I would telephone the military governor and say "Come and shoot".' The

final authority of the military administration lay in its capacity to use force. In the Sudan, as elsewhere, the army regime was to show that it could not build a civilian base without civilian participation. Such participation was impossible without political organization. And political organization was illegal.

With nostalgia for the mechanical perfections of the old authoritarian colonial system, the army regime improvised its variation of indirect rule. This was after August 1959, when Abu Rannat was appointed as head of a commission to consider 'the best ways for the citizens to take part in the government of the country', with emphasis on 'quick' decision-making, and on efficient and unified administration.<sup>21</sup> The commission's recommendations resulted in three ordinances/<sup>2</sup> redolent with colonial 'native' administration associations. The Sudan was returned to stage-by-stage introduction of partially representative institutions, in small doses as and when the regime judged fit. Under local government democracy, the country was divided into eighty-four local councils (eighteen urban and fifty-six rural), two-thirds or one-half of whose members were elected, 'depending on the degree of maturity', and the others nominated. Above the local councils were provincial councils, composed of heads of departments, as *ex-officio* members to represent the government, with two-thirds of the remaining members elect'cd from local councils, and one-third nominated. The chairman of the provincial council was in practice the military governor. Above the provincial councils was the Central Council, composed of the ministers and seventy-two members, six each elected by the nine provincial councils, and eighteen nominated by the president.<sup>23</sup> A striking feature of the first elections to the local councils at the beginning of 1963 was the large number of unopposed candidates, one-third in all. 'What prompted many a candidate to stand for election was the prospect of an easy victory in the absence of people with a political background – who boycotted the election – as well as the allowance or salary he would receive as a member of the local or higher councils,' commented one critic.<sup>24</sup>

Control was exercised from the top. The Council of Ministers

could disqualify anyone from membership of a provincial council, or at any time suspend a provincial council altogether and exercise all its powers. Each minister had power of supervision and inspection over provincial administration in anything concerning his ministry, and he could annul any decision taken by a provincial council, by merely notifying the provincial authority not to execute it. At no level did elected members command a majority; at every level, any nominee could be excluded from a council 'for the sake of the public interest'. Throughout, the president and the Council of Ministers could act as though there had been no delegation of authority at all. For, in fact, there had been none. The Central Council was a dusty and fly-blown shop window, and all that the councils were effectively doing was extending military control deep into the ordinary lives of the Sudanese. On 17 November 1961, the third anniversary of the army take-over, General Abboud declared the aim of his government to be the reinstatement of a parliamentary system based on general elections. But nothing in the council system operated by the junta hinted at this. Once again, as under the colonial system, indirect elections and local councils were screens for the power of an authoritarian centre, with politics and parties treated as extraneous to the raising of popular participation.

The first acts of the military junta had been to outlaw all political parties, ban demonstrations and place the press under severe restriction. The Defence of the Sudan Act of 1958 provided for unlimited detention without trial, the transfer of civil cases to military courts and increased penalties for a wide range of activities considered hostile to the government. In May 1959 alone, fifty-six activists of the Anti-Imperialist Front were arrested and detained without trial until the end of the year. Newspaper proprietors and editors, called to a conference addressed by General Abboud, were warned that the government would tolerate no opposition or criticism, and that no reference should be made in their columns to the political parties or the sects. The Minister of Interior gave notice that he would close down any newspaper or arrest any editor casting doubts on the intentions of the government. Banned topics included

news of the armed forces (except for official hand-outs), criticisms of United States aid or diplomatic facilities extended to experts under aid plans, court proceedings in the trials of political accused, news about workers' or students' strikes, peasant demands and the activities of the ex-politicians.

Not that the ex-politicians were active. They seemed to accept at face value the assurances of the army that it would hold the reins for two years at the longest. They effaced themselves from political life with a sense of relief that they were invalidated out of government with no more than bruised reputations. They abandoned the country to the military as lightly as they had previously indulged in carpet-crossing in the House, or in wildly illogical party alignments, as though it was after all only the luck of the draw. The exception was the Communist Party. First organized in 1944 but never allowed the luxury of public campaigning it had adjusted to a state of illegality under the Condominium and the Republic and was organized to operate underground, without a parliamentary presence, and with precise short- and long-term programmes. It issued protests and rallying calls against the junta in its own name and in association with the trade unions, students and Gezira tenants. It kept up a battery of pressures on NUP, President Azhari and others to declare open opposition to the army regime. It took part in the junta's council system to express opposition from within; but it also advocated a national front of political leaders against army rule.

Not until two years after the military take-over did a memorandum reach General Abbaud over the signatures of some twenty politicians.<sup>25</sup> Among these were Siddiq al-Mahdi, who had succeeded his father as head of the Ansar when Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi died in March 1959, Azhari, Abdallah Khalil and Mohamed Ahmed Mahgoub, the former Umma Foreign Minister who was to become prime minister in 1967. The memorandum urged that the army should once again concentrate on the country's defences, that the emergency should be lifted and that a national government be set up to write a constitution and hold elections. The National Front memorandum was delivered two days after General Abboud announced the system

of provincial councils as a stage in the army's plan for guided democracy. 'You told us in your first proclamation that your regime was transitory,' the memorandum declared. The people had been 'decent enough' to wait 'in spite of their conviction that armies were not made to rule indefinitely.' Why had there been no mention in General Abboud's latest statement of the promised return to full parliamentary government?

The next shot in what became an extended battle of memoranda was fired by the declaration of the 'Honourable Citizens', sponsored by Sayid Ali al-Mirghani, with PDP support. This one, unlike its predecessor, was published in the press and repeatedly broadcast, because it fully supported the regime. By now it was plain to see that, while the military take-over had been mounted to pre-empt the fall from power of an Umma premier and the Umma party, the predominantly Khatmiyya-based and led army had deflected this course. The Shannan-Mohieddin coups were inspired by a combination of radical and Khatmiyya motives, and made the army, once General Wahhab had been removed, a force against and not for the Umma Party. General Abboud was the moderator and conciliator of the factions inside the junta, but he himself was a dedicated follower of the Khatmiyya leader Sayid Ali al-Mirghani; through Abboud himself, Hassan Beshir, Abu Rannat and Ahmed Kheir, all four Shaigia and Khatmiyya, the sect was the core of the government. In the traditional pendulum politics of the Sudanese sects, Ali al-Mirghani's statement of unequivocal support sent the Umma-Ansar forces even further over to the side of the growing opposition.

Concurrent with the lodging of the politicians' petitions were Siddiq al-Mahdi's attempts to conduct private negotiations with the junta. He met General Abboud, and then Generals Magbul and Talaat Farid,\* to protest at the favoured treatment meted out to the Honourable Citizens' memorandum: 'You are favouring supporters and fighting opponents. This is nepotism.'

\*Siddiq's negotiations started in February 1961 and consisted of one meeting with General Abboud and two with Generals Magbul and Farid. Both meetings were minuted. There were also several written memoranda.

Siddiq said that he would have no objection to the continuance of the Supreme Council, provided that some civilians were grafted on to it; but that the Council of Ministers, as the executive government, should be composed exclusively of civilians. Such a reconstituted government should lift the emergency, and hold general elections for a constituent assembly to write a permanent constitution. The two generals pointed out with some firmness that the army had taken over by force, and would not return to barracks except by force. The two generals would convey Siddiq's representations to the Supreme Council, but they were sure what the outcome would be, 'because we are united as a bundle of sticks'. The negotiations were suspended, and then finally aborted by the death of Siddiq in October 1961, only two and a half years after that of his father. Both leaders of the Ansar, though the son proved considerably more outspoken than his father, accepted without question that the onus for keeping the peace lay with them; for the private army of the Ansar, once roused, could prove a formidable adversary of the regime.

Attempts to get concerted anti-junta actions by political leaders in an opposition front were faltering and inconclusive. They were undermined by the support that the PDP and Sayid Ali al-Mirghani lent the regime, and by the hesitancy and passivity of the traditional parties. When in July 1962 twelve political leaders, among them a number who had signed the petition to General Abboud, found themselves arrested and deported without trial to detention in a Juba prison in Equatoria, this was a response not so much to the impact of their representations as to the popular ferment, largely under left-wing leadership, brewing in the country. The twelve men sent into exile for a year\* were a strange bag of Umma, NUP and Communist politicians. Among them were Azhari, Mohamed Ahmed Mahgoub, Abd al-Khalek Mahgoub and Advocate Ahmed Suleiman of the Communist Party, an Omdurman merchant whose arrest was later admitted to be an error, and Abdallah Khalil. The immediate cause of the deportations was a telegram sent to General Abboud protesting at the torture by the military

\*They were released in January 1962.

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police of a witness in a political case, Hassanein, a member of the Communist Party. This became a *cause celebre* when the military court took over the case, blocked the access of lawyers to the victim and the evidence and arrested the defence counsel. The arrest of the politicians, whether they calculated on it or not, was for a while a rallying point of popular opposition to the junta, but the National Front of the parties collapsed in 1962. (The Communist Party had withdrawn from it earlier.) It had produced no coherent programme, no rallying point for sustained opposition. The politicians were as ineffective in opposition as they had been in government.

## **Insurrection**

One advertised achievement of the military government during its first year of office was the conclusion of the Nile waters agreement with Egypt. Pre-coup discussions had probably paved the way, but the army regime claimed the credit.\* An allocation of water was agreed upon, as well as the sum of compensation for the land in the Wadi Haifa region which would be flooded on the completion of Egypt's High Dam. This created the problem of removing and resettling a population of 50,000 in the area. Officially-initiated consultations with the Wadi Halfans were suddenly interrupted during 1960 by the government decision. It had chosen as resettlement area the one site which the Wadi Halfans had been unanimous in rejecting out of hand. Demonstrations ensued in Wadi Haifa, supported by others in Khartoum and other towns openly challenging the junta. Three ministers who went to Wadi Haifa to intervene were kept imprisoned in a hotel for three days by protesting demonstrators who were finally dispersed by police armed with tear gas and whips. In the face of opposition, the military attitude hardened; the resettlement project was one on which the prestige and authority of the regime, not to mention the interests of certain contractors, would rest. The price of prestige helped to cripple

• Although the agreement gave the Sudan only about half the compensation demanded by the previous government.

the central treasury. As for the authority of the regime, the myth of its invulnerability had been challenged by the act of Wadi Haifa defiance, and would never be the same again. The Wadi Haifa protests injected spirit even into the timorous politicians, and initiated bold, supporting demonstrations by students and the trade unions.\*

The following year, 1961, the workers on the railways went on strike for higher wages. Trade unions had been declared abolished a month after the army take-over, 'till present laws are revised and a new law enacted';† and penalties for illegal strikes had been stiffened. The railways workers' union, the pioneer of militancy in the Sudan, ignored the ban, brought its 27,000 workers out on strike for an increase equivalent to almost half as much again of their existing salaries and crippled the railways for a week until the union was dissolved by the junta. Next, the students of the University of Khartoum came out into the streets, as they were to do each year on the anniversary of the army take-over. The University of Khartoum became the open target of the regime: the students' union was declared dissolved; student meetings were consistently interfered with by the police, who also removed any wall newspapers put up by night; campus demonstrations were dispersed. Eventually, irritated beyond endurance by yearly student strikes and demonstrations, the regime altered the dates of the academic terms so as to keep the university closed during November, when the army celebrated the anniversary of its coming to power. The student response was to demonstrate in September, at the convocation ceremony. The government amended the university act to control the institution directly, putting it under the Ministry of Education.

Towards the end of 1963, a general crisis in the cotton-growing schemes, caused by the falling price of cotton and rising production costs, roused the Gezira tenants, already incited by the refusal of the regime to permit them to hold their annual

\*The Wadi Halfa demonstrations were at the end of October 1960. The first memorandum by twenty politicians went to General Abboud on :29 November 1960.

†New trade union legislation was passed in 1960.

elections for their committees. The Gezira scheme is the pivot of the Sudanese economy. The tenants demanded that their share of the cotton proceeds be raised and that the costs of picking should be included in the joint account of state and tenants. When the regime refused, the Gezira farmers responded with a strike of all picking and agricultural operations on the scheme's two million irrigated acres. The government threatened to bring in the army to pick the cotton; but probably because it knew that this would only produce an armed clash, avoided such a step, and capitulated. The tenants' share of the proceeds was raised; the costs of ploughing, though not of picking, were borne by a joint account; and elections were permitted. (These returned to the leadership Sheikh al-Amin, the prominent Communist leader of the Gezira tenants.)

Protests were in most instances, however, more submerged and suppressed than successful. Acts of dissent were often isolated and easily dealt with by the regime; but they were indicative of a decisive turn in public opinion. In the towns, the army was rejected with unconcealed contempt; in many parts of the countryside, especially in the Umma areas, it was barely tolerated. Tribal heads worked the council system, but they were government servants on the government payroll. If the masses of the people were not yet demonstrating in the streets against the regime, they were certainly not working its machinery, as the low polls in elections under the council system showed. Both the Umma and the NUP boycotted the elections. The Communist Party contested them in order to use the councils as instruments with which to attack and undermine the regime. In general, though, the membership of the councils reflected Khatmiyya participation and the PDP policy of support for the regime, even if the party, not officially legal, did not officially say so. The army had managed to commandeer a civilian base of a sort; but this was only in some areas, while in others it was rousing open antagonism. The state of emergency in the country showed no sign of being lifted. The atmosphere of repression had become all-pervading.

Even the much-vaunted economic progress turned out to be exaggerated and distorted. Much was made of the seven-year

economic plan; but this was in greater part the development designed by the British administration before independence, and any economic policy pursued between 1958 and 1964 was a continuation of previous plans and targets. All these schemes and projects were lumped together and, with the impressive-sounding cost label of £250 million, presented afresh. The problem of the Sudan, no different from that of any independent African state, had always been to find money for development. The soldier's government fell – or was helped – out of the right side of the bed. 1958 was the height of the cold war. The Sudan, after Egypt, was the first newly independent country in Africa and occupied a region where investment offered strategic influence if not scintillating economic stakes. The foreign policy announced by Ahmed Kheir<sup>26</sup> sounded like all things to all powers, and achieved a crafty amalgam of ideas to suit both Umma and NUP propensities. There were obeisances both to the Charter of the United Nations and to the Arab League; affirmations of support for the Rights of Man, alongside the specific claims of Algeria, Cyprus and the Cameroons; declarations of non-alignment with military pacts and a rejection of the arms race and nuclear tests, but also expressions of firm ties with the Arab world and the Arab-Islamic countries, with the countries of Africa, and especially 'our sister neighbour Ethiopia'. As if this range of friendship was not catholic enough, the statement added:

We will endeavour to further political, economic and cultural co-operation with all, as no nation can afford not to exchange ideas, trade and expertise with other countries . . . we welcome foreign capital and its investment in our country whether it comes from government or private enterprise . . . we are in need of foreign loans and aid; we shall therefore do our best to create a favourable atmosphere to attract them. In our commercial relations we shall deal with *all countries of the world* on the basis of mutual interest.

As a ringing finale to this bounty of goodwill, the declaration embraced the principles of the Bandung conference and, in conformity with these, recognized forthwith the Peoples' Democratic Republic of China and its six hundred million inhabitants.

The Sudan took aid from West and East. It signed the Nile waters agreement with Egypt, but absented itself from the ceremonial opening of the High Dam. Lip-service was paid to its allegiances with the Arab world; but in practice, under the manipulative touch of Ahmed Kheir, the emphasis was more on the Sudan as part of Africa, so that it could afford to stand at a distance from the forces competing for leadership of the Arab world. This looked like the ideal middle-of-the-way policy, an attempt to be friends with everyone, and to take whatever aid was offered.

United States assistance at last came into its own. Less than a fortnight after the take-over, Ahmed Kheir announced that the original aid agreement concluded by Abdallah Khalil would stand, and that the restrictions imposed by Parliament would be deleted. A government statement declared that the Sudan would use the \$15 million made available in foreign currency to finance imports from external markets, mainly the United Kingdom. The following year, the British government announced that it had agreed to make large export credits available to the Sudan. The regime found itself the recipient of aid from many sources—the World Bank and West Germany among them. But then the economic projects embarked upon by the junta entailed a heavy expenditure of foreign currency. Over the three years 1959-61, the deficit on current account was £8.3 million, with an additional [31.1 million drawn from foreign loan allocations. Repayment and interest charges on loans contracted in 1961 amounted to [19.1 million during 1962-5. An economist commented that the interest to be paid on the loans for the Roseris Dam made the water conserved there more like Coca-Cola. In six years of fierce concentration on dams, roads, bridges, street lighting, all of which involved large capital outlay and monumental physical projects — prestige expenditure, for the army lives by shining brass — a national deficit of more than £75 million was accumulated. Expensive schemes misfired when factories were wrongly sited or too hastily planned. The costs of administration soared. Embarked upon with abandon, as though totally indifferent to the fact that in the long term aid accumulates liabilities, the junta's

economic projects succeeded in plunging the Sudan deep in debt.\*

They also levered a significant new economic group into view, which in turn was to produce changes in the country's political forces. Business had previously been in the hands of small town and country traders. New men were now to be seen, working as contractors and agents, wholesalers and company directors, their first opportunities provided by the need for Sudanese middlemen on the sites being erected by foreign states and firms, and their first capital, in many instances, by lump sum pensions paid to civil servants and retired army men, commissions and rake-offs.

Corruption, never before entirely absent but never present on a dramatic scale, thrived under the military in a variety of ways: new roads were routed past the homes of senior army kin; new homes sprang up for their relatives; huge real estate plots were registered in their names. General Abboud, the once reluctant ruler, grew to enjoy the parades and the public ceremony. Many of his fellow-officers were attracted by the more sordid but remunerative rewards of office. There were accusations of favouritism in the granting of import licences, and unauthorized acquisition of government land. Younger brothers and nephews began to benefit from scholarships abroad, and other relatives from expensive medical treatment there. A spate of prosecution for scandalous sex and embezzlement crimes gave the public a distinct impression that men in high army places were being protected. Members of the junta were having to live down suspicions of direct corruption, immorality and attempts to manipulate the system of justice.

The junta was failing as a government; in the South it was also failing as an army. After the army mutiny of 1955, the South had never been quiet for long. And the short-lived independence governments of Azhari and his successors had

\*Over-estimated revenue and under-estimated expenditure had resulted in a deficit of more than £75 million in five years (News Service, No. 44).

†There was the Nuweila Embezzlement Case x962-3; and the trials that came popularly to be known as the 'Omdurman Girls Case', the 'Suitcase Case' and the 'Dustbin Case'.

failed to solve problems considerably less knotty than those of the South, where they had disastrously under-estimated the crisis. The politicians and the parties had treated the three Southern provinces as an extended electioneering field, for drumming up support in the periodic conquests of majorities in the assembly. Now the army regime proceeded as armies do and decided that the only solution to the Southern problem was a military one. At the end of 1962, there was a prolonged strike in the schools of the South against forced integration of Southerners into the Arab cultural stream. By the end of 1963, the Southern protest had taken the form of organized rebellion headed by a guerrilla force, the Anya Nya. Led by some Southern officers and NCOs who had deserted the army, it was backed by the Azania Liberation Front, a movement in exile or operating in the bush. It was armed and assisted, Khartoum charged, by West Germany, Switzerland, Israel and the Vatican for reasons of their own. The war became intense around April 1964, with strikes by the rebels westwards from bases in Ethiopia along the Upper Nile. Well-trained fighters in a favourable terrain were tying down huge forces and had brought the administration, especially in Equatoria, to the verge of collapse. Tax collections had come to a stop, for there was no agricultural production to tax and little administration to organize the collection. Schools were closed or moved to the North. Thousands of villagers were restricted to camps, and the South experienced a rigorous and repressive army occupation. In turn, the prolonged emergency in the South was debilitating the general economy.

It was also stoking tensions inside the army. The men on dry rations in the swamps and the young officers in the field railed against the incompetence of the top brass, sitting comfortable and safe at army headquarters. Service in the South was supposed to average two or three years, but some officers did duty for considerably longer and knew of officers never posted to the front at all, thanks to the pull that they and their families exerted in Khartoum. As the much-vaunted military solution turned to stalemate or defeat, the military unexpectedly confirmed for a perceptive public its own frailty, uncertainty and sense of failure. It appointed a twenty-five-man commission on the

South, and opened the issue to public discussion. The army's final justification lies in how it conducts a war. This one was being lost in full view of the country.

Public opinion was voiced with uninhibited frankness. It dissociated itself with expressions of shame and anger from the excesses of the armed offensive in the South. The Southern crisis needed a political, not a military solution; and this depended of necessity on a return to parliamentary government in the Sudan. Such was certainly not what the junta had wanted to hear. It placed a ban on public meetings. But it was too late. At the University of Khartoum, student actions were beginning to trigger off events that were to bring the army regime in the Sudan to an end.

During September 1964, a student meeting made outspoken attacks on the government. On 10 October the security authorities banned a discussion circle, and the police dispersed a meeting in the science faculty. Eleven days later the students met in defiance of the ban. For hours beforehand, the police had been taking up positions on the university campus, which – appropriately enough for the events that followed – had formerly been the British army barracks. As the meeting opened, the police used loudspeaker hailers to order the students to disperse. Nobody moved. The police read the riot act warning and then hurled their tear-gas bombs into the gathering, chasing the students into the hostels where they ran to wash the tear-gas from their eyes, and then interfering with the water supply. During a running battle between students and police which lasted the better part of an hour, rifle shots were heard.

'I went into the room where a body lay, covering the mattress with red blood,' a student participant said; 'and as we carried the wounded out, the police were using their batons on us.'<sup>27</sup> In subsequent rueful mitigation of the police shooting, officialdom explained that the student troubles had broken out on a night when the police commandant had been in bed with a broken leg, and the commissioner of the police and General Irwa, the Minister of Interior, away from the capital. The request of panic-stricken police for support from the police post in the

vicinity had accidentally brought reinforcements armed not with anti-riot sticks, but with fuc-arms.<sup>2s</sup>

Ahmed al-Gurashi was shot dead that night; a second student died in hospital the following day; and several dozen students and police were injured. When Ahmed's body was taken to the morgue at the hospital, students flocked there in droves. The next morning the newspapers carried no report of the shooting. 'It was as though nothing had happened,' the students said. 'No one in the Sudan knew.'

A procession from the hospital that started with some thousand participants swelled to a massive 30,000 in the Abdel Moniem Square. Throughout the morning, crowds of students and secondary-school pupils were joined by people from all walks of life in the capital. The afternoon of the giant gathering and that evening, enraged crowds were overturning and firing police vehicles in the streets. The following day, Friday, was one of sporadic shootings, as crowds formed in spite of police warnings and an early curfew imposed for two in the afternoon. There were incidents, scattered and spontaneous, throughout the capital; and behind the scenes, organization was forming.

Another great procession began to form on the Saturday morning. Jittery police, and behind them the army, ringed round the building of the Judiciary in the centre of the capital. Vast crowds milled about outside; and inside, judges, lawyers, university academics, others from the professions and representatives of the trade-union movement prepared statements to be carried at the head of a procession to the palace. Several of these statements demanded an immediate investigation into the shootings; the university academics went much further, to demand the return of the army to barracks. The police refused to permit the procession to move; they would allow six citizens to present the petitions, but no more. The leaders of the procession, prominent among them the Deputy Chief Justice, Judge Babiker Awadalla, were conducting urgent negotiations on the telephone with General Abboud in the palace, when shots were heard from the vicinity of the great milling crowds. Negotiations on the right of the procession to march were still under way, but it seemed that the police were forcibly dispersing

the crowd. One of the judges, Abdel Magid Imam, came striding out of the Judiciary towards the police officer in charge. 'I am a Judge of the High Court,' he said. 'I order that you, the police, leave.' The police officer saluted and dispersed his force. The army reinforcements standing by were immediately summoned, and no procession moved that day; but state authority had evaporated in the public challenge to it by representatives of the law. The police had acknowledged that they should act only with judicial sanction, and the armed power of the junta was being steadily emasculated by popular defiance in the streets.

In 1961 the underground Communist Party had posed the weapon of the political general strike as the way to bring down the military regime. The day before the shooting at the university, members of the party, meeting illegally, had studied an appraisal of the political situation which characterized the country as not yet ready for a strike, and the leaders of the other parties as obstacles rather than allies in opposition. By the afternoon of the banned procession, the general strike was on the agenda. Meetings of academics, lawyers, teachers, doctors, students, together with leaders of the trade unions and the Gezira tenants, were turning what had been a footloose and spontaneous unity of protest into the Professionals' Front. This new body, called into existence and fashioned by the October events, would also be ultimately destroyed by them: until it rose phoenix-like from the ashes of a still later crisis of government in 1969.

The Professionals' Front arose in reaction to the incidents of the day; but as it solidified, it changed its nature. The social reforms required by its radical core (like the demand for nationalization of the private cotton schemes, of foreign banks and firms, and for a state monopoly of foreign trade, that issued from the Gezira tenants); the solid base given it by the masses of the Three Towns, the Gezira farmers and the unions; and the feel of street power at its feet: all this made the Professionals' Front far more than a reflowering of the intellectual leadership given by the Graduates' Congress during the independence awakening of the 1930s.

The general strike was announced the afternoon that the

procession was banned; and when the Deputy Chief Justice threw his weight behind it, he and another leading High Court judge were dismissed from their posts, and placed under arrest. Meanwhile in Omdurman, the political parties had been stirred from their torpor and were at work to form a combined front of the Umma, the NUP, the **PDP** and the Moslem Brotherhood, whose leader Hassan Turabi had been a voluble orator at the student meetings. The two Fronts of politicians and radical 'professionals' were to hold their first joint meeting by the following week.

The general strike ground the towns to a standstill. It halted all internal communications, emptied the administration of its civil servants, cut the army in the South from its supply lines and reinforcements, and drew massive popular demonstrations up and down the country. The towns were rising in slightly slower sequence than the capital, but they were rising all the same, at Port Sudan, at Medani, El Fasher and Atbara. Kasala, some 500 miles to the east, sent two trainloads of citizens to join the insurrection in the capital. At Gezira, delegates of sixty organizations, watched by a continuous audience of 3,000, held a conference for the duration of the strike to hammer out new policies for the country.

By now the Supreme Council was in almost continuous session. A strong whiff of grapeshot might have sustained a rigorously united and self-assured army government for a while; but at the height of the crisis, the army itself fell apart. Hassan Beshir, the strong man of the Supreme Council, was preparing a ruthless crackdown on demonstrators, but he was alerted that an officers' revolt was imminent. By Monday evening, a torn and fractured Supreme Council, that had lost confidence in its ability to govern, decided that it had no option but to dissolve itself and the Council of Ministers. General Abboud would retain legislative and executive powers pending the formation of a transitional national government. The radio broadcast to this effect emptied the houses of the Three Towns : with a great roar, the populace piled into the streets to welcome the end of six years of army rule.

The debacle was caused by the combined assault on the junta

from within and from without. The street barricades and the general strike, the emergence of a militant leadership, drew the Sudanese in the towns and on the Gezira into direct action of the sort that shakes Cabinets, but does not necessarily dislodge armies. It was the splits in the army command and in the officer corps at several levels that toppled an already shaky junta.

The Kibaida, Shannan-Mohieddin and Ali Hamid coups inside the army had been snuffed out, and their supporters removed in careful and regular purges. Yet a Free Officer tradition and even an organization, the *Dubat Ahrar*, had persisted in the army. During 1961-2, *The Voice of the Armed Forces* had circulated secretly, though spasmodically. When the crisis came, junior officers, mostly second lieutenants and captains, were debating among themselves one of two courses: a coup within the army to install 'an honest man' at the head of a reformed military government; or the return to civilian government under the young educated rather than the traditional old-guard politicians. The October convulsions threw the middle-ranking officers, majors and lieutenant-colonels into the mess and barrack-room arguments of the junior officers. The latter had decided in favour of a civilian government as long as it was headed by an army man: to conserve the prestige and the influence of the army, but also to shore up a regime of young politicians. The 'honest man', these junior officers determined, should be Colonel Mohammed al-Baghir Ahmed. But Colonel Baghir proved to be a reluctant candidate. He asked for forty-eight hours in which to make up his mind. In that time, news of the plan reached Mohammed Idriss, third in command of the army after Generals Abboud and Hassan Beshir, and then Hassan Beshir himself. Hassan Beshir had his own intrigue. He was planning to assume command in place of General Abboud. The young officers' plot, he considered, called simply for the accommodation of Colonel Baghir as the representative of the junior officers, under his own supreme command. The plot came to a head at the final Monday meeting of the Supreme Council. Several diehards were refusing to surrender authority. The members of the junta and their advisers who had been talking about transitional steps to civilian rule insisted that the

army should continue as guide, allowing progress in its own rime, in its own way. Hassan Beshir, making his own bid for control, tried to convince General Abboud that he had no option but to cede power; the army was against him. When his argument failed to carry conviction, he called on General Mohammed Idriss for confirmation. Junior officers provided their own; for at this juncture, troops were seen to be taking up positions in the vicinity of the palace. It was a motley collection of non-commissioned officers and men drawn from the Engineers' Corps at Omdurman, but it made its point to General Abboud, who not long after made the radio announcement dissolving the Supreme Council.

While the Sudan celebrated this, General Hassan Beshir alone among the members of the junta was not under house arrest, and troops called to Khartoum from Shendi were under the command of a close relative and confidante of General Mohammed Idriss, Brigadier Mohammed Mukhtar. Now junior officer plans for a final strike to wipe out all remnants of the old army command became an open secret. Rules of conspiracy were thrown to the wind. The army and the Three Towns hummed with news of imminent young officer action against the intrigues of the generals. By mid-week General Beshir's proffered leadership in a reformed command was decisively rejected by a meeting of the army commanders of the Three Towns. Beshir had hoped to sweep the young officers behind his bid for control of the army, and then of the government. He had calculated on the force of their rebellion against the junta; but not on their identity of political conviction with the graduates of 1956 and of the independence years, who were storming the army's citadels with another objective than to install one more general at the head of government.

Two rebel streams of the Sudan's independence youth looked as though they were about to converge and change the face of the country's politics. The young officers who had political conflicts with the old army command were teaming up with the young radicals of the professional organizations, the unions and the Communist Party. They had already succeeded in bringing down the army junta. The crucial issue for the Sudan was the

shape of a successor government. On the day after the dissolution of the Supreme Council, the first official contact took place between the Professionals' Front and the United Front of the political parties. While the meeting was in progress, two of the generals from the Supreme Council attended as negotiators, to establish the first formal contacts between the Professionals' Front, the political parties and General Abboud, who was waiting to cede power. But how and to whom was the power to be ceded? The Supreme Council had no sooner resigned than it seemed likely that the army command and the parties would negotiate a settlement between them. To prevent this, the word went out for a mobilization of the Three Towns in a renewed phase of popular demonstration. The young officers began to see themselves as armed caretakers of a government more radical than any the political parties could produce, and built from the support that the Professionals' Front had mustered. Suddenly the two streams of young radicals were diverted, and dammed, by an unpredictable and tragic incident. When a crowd began to form outside the palace on the Wednesday morning, to demonstrate against rumours of the Beshir play for power, and against a compromise between army commanders and politicians, a panic burst of fire from an armoured car killed close to a score of people. In the wave of anti-army feeling that swept the country, the young officers opted for the army's complete return to barracks, and the handing of political power back to civilians in whatever form they could negotiate.

However loosely coordinated and haphazardly organized, the young officers' movement had defeated the designs of the generals to resurrect the army junta. For, from the moment that they had seized the initiative, the army had not been united or reliable enough for its command to exert authority. Conversely, the sudden abdication from the political arena of the young officers enfeebled the forces that between them brought down the army regime, since a popular movement for political reform was already meeting the opposition of the traditional parties.

The negotiations at army headquarters were carried on jointly by the representatives of the Professionals' Front and the parties; and by the eighth day after the shooting at the University,

they were concluded. The two groups combined to form, for 103 at first exhilarating and then uneasy days, the Transitional government. The old guard and the new militants were prisoners of one another. They were in control of a power that had been partly seized, partly negotiated. Together they steered a policy that went too far for the parties, but not far or fast enough for their partners in office.

The old-style politicians found the Professionals' Front a suspicious animal. It was compounded of intellectuals and radicals, townsmen and agitators all (not least, the well-known members of the Communist Party, who belonged to the Front in their own right as leading professionals or as veteran leaders of organized labour and the Gezira tenants' union). These were men who had initiated action before and without the political parties, and action of a kind that the parties had carefully eschewed in the past. It was the presence of the Professionals' Front and its leadership of the mammoth strike which killed any prospect that the parties might have entertained for negotiating a transfer of authority directly with the junta. Both parties and army knew well that the politicians had no command over the course of the strike and could not hope to call it off or cut it short as a token of their strength in any play for power.

During the feverish days of the insurrection, it was dangerous to quarrel over the aims of government, for the means of governing were not yet fully wrested from the generals. But even as the Professionals' and United Fronts began to discuss terms for the liquidation of the military regime with General Abboud, what had started as a revolutionary seizure of power was diluted during the process of bargaining into a negotiated compromise. It was agreed that there would be guarantees of basic freedoms; a lifting of the state of emergency; the guaranteed autonomy of the judiciary and the university; the release of all political prisoners and detainees; a foreign policy of opposition to colonialism and military pacts; the transfer of the Chief Justice's powers to a five-man High Court of Appeal; and the formation of a commission to draft laws 'consistent with Sudanese traditions'. On these points there was no dispute. When it came to a policy for the South, however, the army insisted that the state

of emergency should not be lifted there. From the start, therefore, the October government was infected with the same weakness, the Southern crisis, that had promoted the military collapse. The North felt that, 'by their bare hands tearing down the military regime they accomplished a great act of apology and atonement to which the Southerners should have responded with equal magnanimity. The mere overthrow of the military was sufficient in their view to call for acceptance by the South that the North were of the same kith and kin.'<sup>29</sup> It was a failure of imagination and of policy not to perceive that the euphoria of October had not permeated Southwards; that the crisis in the South was too endemic to be conciliated by half-measures; and that to the Southern provinces, living under uninterrupted martial law, the administration and the army run by Khartoum did not look very different.

Out of the October rising came a Cabinet of fifteen members. It was headed by Sir al-Khatim al-Khalifa, a former Director of Education, chosen because he had a civil service and not a political background, and was a conciliatory figure acceptable not only to all partners in government but also in the South. Each of the five political parties- Umma, NUP, PDP, Communists and the Moslem Brotherhood - had one representative in the Cabinet. Seven posts were filled by the Professionals' Front, to represent the workers, peasants, lawyers, engineers, teachers, academics and students. Two seats allocated to the South were filled by Clement Mboro, as Minister of Interior, and Ezbon Mundiri, as Minister of Communications, on behalf of the Southern front; but less in the spirit that North and South should work together for changed policies, than that Khartoum was showing signs of weakness and could be worked against from within.

Not that the Transitional government was free from its own inner dissensions. The October victory was claimed by all forces; but they had conflicting ideas of how to use it. The parties could contain neither their alarm at their minority position in a sinisterly radical government nor their impatience for elections to a new assembly. The Professionals' Front insisted that the gains of October were not yet secure; that the

failures of parliamentary democracy in the hands of the traditional parties had precipitated the country into military rule; and that October had been a popular mandate for social and political reform to prevent all this from happening again. This spirit fired a series of edicts by the October ministers to sweep clean the house vacated by the junta. A purge was ordered of guilty men in the army and civil service (twenty senior officers who had actively supported the military regime were pensioned off). Newspapers that had accepted subsidies from the junta were suspended. One commission was appointed to advise on agricultural reform, and another to probe the forces behind the hand-over to the army. This last was empowered to question and arrest civilian and military personnel and any other person who had 'participated in the destruction of democratic life'. It was strongly opposed by the Umma Party, as violating the guarantee given by the politicians during their negotiations with General Abboud before the installation of the October government. But in the streets the cry was 'Hang the Generals'; and with them Ahmed Kheir and Abu Rannat, the second of whom excited particular hostility for his collaboration with the junta.

A committee was set up to replace 'native' administration with local government. An Illegal Enrichment Court was established to prosecute charges of corruption and suspect economic deals. (For the most part its findings were inconclusive.) Women other than graduates were given the vote for the first time in the history of the Sudan. A quarter century of fairly cordial relations between the governments of Ethiopia and the Sudan, inaugurated when Sudanese troops helped re-install the Emperor on his throne after the war, was disturbed by a declaration of support for the Eritrean insurgents. This may in part have been a reaction to reports that reached Khartoum on the eve of the junta's collapse that the Emperor of Ethiopia had offered General Abboud the services of two battalions.

Such reforming vigour was deceptive, however, for within the government the Professionals' Front was struggling to survive under a bombardment of charges of Communist domination, and a demand from the Umma Party for its outright dissolution.

Bitter and unresolved arguments about what the basis for elections and the character of a new constitution should be, throbbled in a partnership trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. Irresistibly the government began to disintegrate into its component parts. The Umma and the NUP explored an alliance, their old conflict relegated to the background in the need to unite against forces to the left of them both. The Gezira tenants demanded that half the seats in any new assembly be reserved for workers and tenants. Sadiq al-Mahdi gave notice that the parties would never tolerate this, and insisted that a new government should be formed in proportion to the results secured by them in the previous parliamentary elections.

Black Sunday, on 6 December 1964, brought the Southern conflict to Khartoum. In church congregations throughout the capital, Southerners were exhorted to assemble at the airport to meet Clement Mboro, the Minister of the Interior, on his return from the South. The plane did not arrive as scheduled. Enraged crowds of Southerners stormed through the capital, smashing and burning cars, and attacking passers-by. By the end of the day scores of people were dead and many more injured; and the cause of conciliation with the South – along with the ability of the Transitional government to effect it – had been dealt a grave setback. The round table conference a few months later at Khartoum went some way towards propitiating a section of the Southern leadership; but despite the unilateral cease-fire declaration by Khartoum and the attempt to solve the problem of Southern refugees, the Southern conflict became even more intractable as Southern secessionist leaders read the signs of conciliation as evidence of weakness. The conflict continued to drain the country's material resources, erode the unity of the state, and, immediately, block the way to national elections and a permanent constitution. The army, dislodged from central power, still ruled the South.

In mid-February 1965, the Ansar massed at the capital in a show of force against the Transitional government. The Prime Minister resigned; chosen for his acceptability to all sides, he was unable to resist pressures from one of them. 'Cooperation is now impossible with the party leaders,' he said: but his

resignation was effected so quietly and confidentially that the Professionals' Front complained it had not had notice of it. For five days the country was without a Cabinet –during the vacuum, it was suggested that resort be had to a government of civil servants – and when one was produced, the political parties were once again in sole command. Elections held three months later installed an Umma-NUP coalition. (The PDP boycotted the elections ostensibly because of the crisis in the South, but more probably because it feared to reveal its weakness in the country after its collaboration with the junta; it was now trying to erase this record in a wild swing to the left and an alliance with the Communist Party.)

The Sudan was back in the familiar but fatuous round of Cabinet reshuffles, assembly crises and coalitions, governments falling and struggling to their feet, rumour of party alliances and mergers and internecine disputes. But the disputes seemed to be about the lesser, not the more important, issues. All the major parties that juggled government amongst themselves for the ensuing years held much the same view on economics, foreign relations and the South. They advocated no significant change from the Gezira-type mixture of private enterprise and state concerns; nor hazarded any solution to an economy stunted and limping, to low cotton sales, and balance of payment crises. The professional politicians continued to seek the purpose of independence in the pursuit of political office. Policies and programmes to formulate what the country required from independence were irrelevant, indeed distracting, to the manipulation of party alliances.

The Sudan was a country that had embarked on independence with elation and verve. It suffered less than most from the psychological hang-over of colonialism: partly because the British withdrawal was sudden, and the intensive drive for Sudanization made it complete; partly because Islamic culture and a secular education system resisted any notion of a superior alien culture and pressures for Anglicization; and partly because the educated, who had been suspected and rejected by the British administration, embraced the independence cause with fervour and militancy. This was not a nation only semi-conscious

at independence. In the towns and on the Gezira the young men sparkled with ideas; political controversy was animated; and the independence generation not only judged the politicians and the military, to find them wanting, but acted in consequence to bring them down. Perhaps uniquely in independent Africa, the Sudan has a revolutionary intelligentsia with close links with a vital trade union, as well as student and peasant movement, and a seasoned marxist party. The October events demolished the military regime in a popular surge rarely seen in Africa. But the aftermath bequeathed a sapped resilience, a sense of missed opportunities and lost causes, that fitted only too easily into the continent-wide pattern of post-independence setbacks.

The six years of army rule had convinced the Sudan that military efficiency was no better able than political rhetoric to grapple with the country's problems. In the hands of the parties after, as before, the military regime, the political system grew tired and flaccid. The mass enthusiasm of the cities was dissipated; the passivity of the country, left undisturbed, for once, in October, the contest had been over a real issue: the site of popular power. And that contest had been lost to the discredited professional politicians. The conflicts within the Transitional government expressed the lasting deadlock of Sudanese political life: the impulse for social change coming from the towns, from the young educated, from the unions and from the only organized ranks of the peasantry, is smothered by the deadweight of the countryside and the sects, which are invoked for religion but deployed for politics. The Ansar, the private army of the Umma, can lay physical siege to the capital; but even when the swords of the faithful are sheathed, under an electoral system of one man, one vote, the countryside engulfs the state. Constituency delimitation in the 1953 and 1956 elections shows the added weight given to the countryside from the Sudan's first election in 1953 to the second in 1956:

	<i>Size of urban constituency</i>	<i>Rural</i>
1953	43,000	120,000
1956	53,000	60,000

Transitional government proposals to provide reserved seats for graduates, workers and Gezira tenants were attempts to weight the parliamentary system in favour of the independence generation in the towns, and against the stagnant countryside, where a vote is traditionally an act not of political but of religious or communal faith. This, above all, was what the traditional parties feared from the Transitional government, and so they destroyed it.

For a while after the elections of spring 1965, the NUP and the Umma Party served together in government, with Sadiq al-Mahdi at the head. But party politics based on sect allegiance seemed to reveal its anachronism in the split that broke the Umma Party wide open. This was during 1966, when Imam al-Hadi, the religious head of the Ansar, challenged the leadership of his nephew, Sadiq al-Mahdi. Sadiq, thirty-year-old Oxford graduate, hailed by the Western press as the student-prince of the Sudan and its last remaining hope, had helped defeat the forces of October, but he was not entirely impervious to them. The country was changing, and the parties had to change with them. To the Imam, the Mahdi House was an ideology and a creed based on the Book of Allah and the Traditions of his Prophet. Sadiq's wing of the Umma Party wanted to refashion the party as an instrument of 'national reconciliation' between traditional and modern, including the urban intelligentsia and the students, and even sections of the labour movement.

For the greater part of its life, the Umma leadership had been drawn from the tribal heads of the Ansar living on subsistence agriculture, mostly in the west of the Sudan. The Gezira Scheme, under part-state ownership and direction, and the irrigation provided by the Sennar Dam, nurtured a landed peasantry in close alliance with the Ansar leadership; for it was Abdel-Rahman al-Mahdi, with his sons and kinsmen, who acquired first one agricultural licence, then another, on the private estates of the White Nile, south of Gezira. From the 1930s, but especially after the Second World War and the 1950 cotton boom, a new class of landed proprietors grew on the vast estates carved out of the 630,000 acres. There the pump-scheme owners, with

a turnover of £r3 million a year, are responsible for the cotton production of the country and are the pillars of the Umma Party. The estates of 10,000 to 40,000 acres each are divided into holdings of ten feddan\* for cotton and five for millet; and the tenants of these holdings, bonded in semi-feudal relationship to the big proprietors, constitute a fertile recruiting ground for Umma votes and Ansar mobilization. After October, the Tenants' Association of the White Nile started a demand for nationalization and the conversion of the schemes into cooperatives. Personal and political fissions in the Madhi family and the Umma Party were aggravated when, in response to the pressures for nationalization, the Sadiq group initiated an agrarian reform project, providing for the nationalization of the Blue and White Nile schemes for which the fifteen-year pump licences had expired. The cotton boom was over; many of the schemes were already running at a loss; and compensation for nationalization would have provided a landed group with ready capital resources to invade other sectors of the economy. To the wing of the Umma Party not ready to make any adaptation to the demands of the modern sector of the economy, the agrarian reform project was an ominous attack.

It began to look as though the NUP and the Sadiq wing of the Umma Party might draw together; and though they could not banish the old *tariqa* allegiances, they might in part displace them. Could political alignments swing from the fulcrum of Ansar-Khatmiyya, Umma-NUP competition? The Umma Party was changing in some measure. So, too, was the NUP. Once it had been the birthplace of the independence movement and its vanguard; but in office it had refused to recognize a body like the Sudan Trade Union Federation, and it had passed the Subversive Activities Act to curb the unions. The party of small traders, villagers, shop-keepers and young nationalists had become the party of an expanding commercial group. This group had been fertilized by the military regime and was growing in the shadow of foreign investment. Many of the party's energies went on cornering, in any government, the Ministry of Trade and other such key posts; for control over the distribution

\*1 feddan = 1.038 acres.

of import licences, tenders and contracts, and the judicious use of these, could build personal fortunes and party influence. Both the NUP and the Sadiq wing of the Umma Party were steered by leaderships set on acquiring interests in the modern sector of the economy, whatever their earlier traditional base had been.

The Sudan had been a more egalitarian society than many. Poverty and religious piety have combined to give the country a spare and ascetic aspect. In Khartoum there has been little of the frantic conspicuous consumption of, say, West African capitals; nor the vast gulf between rich and poor (though the gap is growing; the *per capita* national income is still only £27 a year, but an MP, for example, earned £1,200). In the mud-brick city of Omdurman, Azhari's bizarrely over-ornamented mansion, and one or two others almost as dizzy and ostentatious, are pointed out with derision as trophies of the military period and certain other 'opportunities'. But even if off to a slow start, government and business, political and administrative office and economic pull have been growing as parasites one upon the other, and the Sudan, like the rest of Africa, has been acquiring that new political-administrative elite that uses office to turn itself into an economic class.

In the towns near the agricultural schemes, a new elite of the civil service has developed. Its average income is perhaps ten times that within the rising middle group of farmers. The *nouveaux riches* merchants and the politicians angling for business aim to displace the weaker of the alien groups like the Greek and Armenian merchants. The owners of the private agricultural schemes have surplus capital and ambitions in industry. These groups are swirling about in all the traditional parties, which would tend, one might think, to bring them closer together. The old tendencies persist, however, in negating neat categorizations. The one is the *tariqas*; dead, many charge, as religious inspiration, but still with a hold on mass political allegiance. The other is the tenacity with which the politicians play the old game of expediency.

Azhari, leading the NUP, watched the split in the House of the Mahdi widen until he was certain that it had reached a point

beyond bridging, and that Sadiq al-Mahdi's political influence had been deeply undermined by the flocking of the faithful to the Imam. Then he forged an alliance with his old enemy, the PDP. When Sadiq's government collapsed under a two-pronged attack from the Imam's wing of Umma and from the NUP, Azhari formed a government coalition with, of all groups, the Imam-led Umma, under Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub of the latter as premier. (The NUP and the PDP merged formally as the United Democratic Party in December 1967.) Had the Sudan ever seen a stranger coalition? It had, once again, no meaning beyond the enjoyment of power. The issue of a permanent constitution for the country remained to be settled. Was a presidential or a parliamentary system to be preferred? Azhari was leaving no move untried to secure his accession in any system, though a presidential one seemed the most likely.

At the beginning of 1968, the Sudan went through yet another constitutional crisis. Elections, the third since independence, had been promised for February 1968; but the wrangling over the constitution had been prolonged, and because it was not complete, the group in the Assembly headed by Sadiq dug in its heels against the dissolution of the House. The Sadiq group, for all its talk of modernity, had staked its political future – as had the Imam's faction – on an Islamic Constitution which, if it did nothing else, would destroy any hope of a solution in the South and irreparably harm secular politics as a whole. (In alliance with the Sadiq group and campaigning for the Islamic Constitution was the Moslem Brotherhood. Its call for a return to the fundamentalist purity of the faith made attacks on radicalism acts of Islamic revival rather than of political persecution, and gave the Brotherhood a sinister access to the coffers of kingdoms in the Middle East.)

The constitutional crisis seemed insoluble, with no single party able to command a majority in the Assembly. At this juncture Azhari showed all his old mastery at manipulation. He prevailed on a majority of the Assembly to resign. This gave a majority of the Supreme Council a justification for dissolving the Assembly, which needs a two-thirds membership to function. The opposition MPs, led by Sadiq, refused to recognize the

dissolution. Parliament's buildings were closed, but not the lawns near by, and there the opposition MPs assembled. They accepted the resignations of those who had not convened; declared themselves to be the country's lawful government; and took urgent case on the unconstitutionality of the dissolution to the Court of Appeal. Their championship of a thoroughly unpopular Parliament roused no answering echo in the streets. As for the Court, it was in no mood to treat the legal points with urgency, since the Assembly, under Sadiq's own leadership, had previously refused to abide by a court judgement against a constitutional amendment banning the Communist Party.

The army found itself in a dilemma. Would it, in this newest political crisis, once again be called upon to do its duty by the state, and support government? Which *was* the state's lawful government: the MPs and party leaders who had resigned; or the minority that continued to convene itself in an Assembly? Army headquarters addressed an urgent official note to the Chief Justice, with copies to Azhari, Mahgoub and Sadiq, asking for a statement on the constitutional legalities and declaring that, as custodians of the constitution, the army would support only the duly constituted government.

The crisis evaporated when the Sadiq group could make no more than a token protest. In the elections a few months later, the United Democratic Party of the Azhari and PDP groups won four of the 218 seats, to be joined in coalition by the Imam's faction of the Umma Party, with thirty seats. Sadiq's party won only thirty-six seats, while the leader and several of his executive members lost theirs. The Moslem Brothers won three seats, and their leader, also, was defeated. The Communist Party polled a fifth of the vote in the fourteen towns of the Sudan (it elected two MPs to the House) but insignificant support in the countryside.

Another of the Sudan's governments of expediency was in power and a new cycle of intrigue and careerism began. The form of the constitution remained unresolved. The economy stumbled on. The troubles in the South continued raging. The Southern parties commanded thirty seats in the Assembly and had been variously aligned with the others in electoral politics;

but the nub of the crisis remained the demand of the Azania Liberation Front for the 'liberation' of the Southern Sudan, and the inability of government to grapple with the issues there short of sending its army in to pacify the area when turbulence made this necessary.

A popular insurrection joined by the young officers of the army had interrupted this circuit before. Young radicals and clamorous townspeople had brought down a military government, but they had not been able to make government in its place. As for the army's own entry into politics, this had not evolved into revolution, as in Egypt. It had been a mere holding action, reforming nothing, initiating no change except backwards, *into* the colonial administrative past. When the military had been eclipsed, the country had returned to the same dilemmas of poverty and political deadlock; with these rendered, if anything, more intractable by the six years of the military regime.

### **A Putsch with a Popular Front**

On 25 May 1969 the government of the Sudan was toppled once more by coup d'etat. Any line of inheritance linking 1969 with 1958, however, ran back not to the military usurpers of power, but to the forces which unseated the junta only five years earlier. In 1964 radicals of the Professionals' Front and young army officers had converged to force the dissolution of the Abboud government, but they had failed to hold power. Five years were spent by the revived Free Officer movement in the Sudanese army assimilating the lessons of the October failure. It had been weak, and had finally been destroyed, not only because it was a compromise with the traditional political parties, but also because it had needed the protection, even the assertion, of a reformed army under Free Officer leadership. The plan in 1964 to place an armed striking force at the disposal of the new government thrown up by the events of October had been doomed by the unpopularity of the army after six years of military rule. This time the officers would seize power, but they would not

withdraw to the barracks once this was achieved; they would ride in tandem together with the civilians they placed in power. Their claim to legitimacy would be that the government of the political parties they displaced had itself usurped power from the Transitional government, formed after the downfall of the military regime in 1964.

A National Revolutionary Council was created, presided over by thirt:9'-nine-year-old Colonel Jaaffer al-Nimeiry, the leader of the coup, and consisting of ten members, all young army officers except for the former Chief Justice, Babiker Awadullah. The latter was appointed prime minister, and presided over a twenty-one-member Council of Ministers. This itself included several members of the Transitional government and several who had been executive members of the Professionals' Front during 1964; two prominent Southerners, one of them the well-known Communist Joseph Garang, and the other an ex-Southern Front MP; several members of the former Socialist Party, and several Communists like Farouk Abou Eissa, who had been secretary of the Professionals' Front; two former NUP MPs; a number of intellectuals and university academics, a few of them with a reputation as independent marxists; the editor of *Al Ayyam*; an ex-army colonel from the Nuba Mountains; a former Professionals' Front member who was the manager of the country's largest textile mill; and the conservative deputy-manager of the Sudan Commercial Bank.<sup>30</sup> The regime looked like an October type of coalition, without the parties and with young army men standing by to stiffen the mixture; though also with a clear commitment from the outset to find a political formula that would tilt the political system away from the control of the traditional parties and the sects with which they were linked. It was disclosed after the event that secret negotiations had been opened with Sadiq al-Mahdi, testing his attitude to the new regime in the light of his conflict with the more traditional Umma forces led by Imam al-Hadi. Sadiq had offered to support the men of 25 May on condition that Communists should be excluded from the government; he was detained not long after. 'You see,' explained Major Farouk Osman Hamdallah, Minister of the Interior, 'it's impossible

to introduce socialism without the help of the Communists as individuals and the workers as a class. Those who try to separate us from our natural allies refuse to accept the transformation of society and are probably seeking to destroy us.'<sup>31</sup>

Immediately after the coup, the constitution was annulled, and all political parties dissolved. It was announced that no political leader of any dissolved party would be allowed to join the government in his capacity as such a party member. A new political movement was to be formed of workers, farmers, intellectuals, soldiers and those 'who work with national capital that is not tied up with colonialism'. The revolution had become necessary, Nimeiry declared, because the Sudan's independence had been crippled by successive governments which had no ambition other than that of power. 'Our political parties moved in the circle of imperialism and acted according to its will.'<sup>32</sup>

By the time of the 1969 coup, the country's debts were beating all records, at double the figure for 1964. The worst of it was that these credits, obtained at high rates of interest to finance development projects, had been used chiefly to meet a budget deficiency caused by waste, lavish expenditure and inordinate increases in administrative personnel. By 1969 internal borrowing had soared to over ten times the figure of 1966. Faced with this catastrophic situation, the World Bank, Khartoum's main creditor, and Western powers had become more and more reluctant to listen to the appeals for aid from the Sudanese government. When the new regime came to power in 1969, *it* announced that it would expand economic and trade relations with the Arab and the socialist states; extend the public sector to replace foreign investment; encourage national capital that was unconnected with imperialism; and protect this capital so that it could compete with foreign capital under the supervision of the public sector. The Sudan would be 'democratic, socialist and non-aligned'. It was a decision prompted by both necessity and conviction. How far internal structural changes in the economy would go, it was early to say.

The coup had been made by fourteen officers who comprised the inner circle of a Free Officer movement inside the Sudanese army. This body had worked clandestinely for ten years, according

to the new regime's Minister of the Interior and member of the Revolutionary Council, Major Farouk Osman Hamdallah.<sup>33</sup> Nimeiry himself had a long political record within the Sudanese army. He had been dismissed after the Kibeida affair of 1957, but had been permitted to re-enlist in 1959. That was the year of the Ali Hamid coup, and though Nimeiry had been involved, he had eluded detection. During October 1964, when Colonel Baghir had been put forward as spokesman of the young officers, Nimeiry was said by the initiated to have been the real leader of the Free Officers.

During an amateurish coup attempt of trainee soldiers led by Khalid el Kid in 1966, Nimeiry had once again fallen under suspicion and been detained; but this had been one coup attempt in which he had not been involved, and he had been released. Posted to the training centre at Gebeit in the Red Sea hills, he had concentrated on the recruitment into the Free Officer organization of the young officers who flowed through the training courses. In May Nimeiry was on leave from Gebeit in Khartoum; it was during this fortnight that he organized the coup.

At least fourteen of the army's senior commanders were out of the country, using the unbearably hot Sudanese summer months for technical assignments abroad; delegations were negotiating arms purchases in both Cairo and Moscow; another three top army men happened to be in London for medical treatment. It was a swift and bloodless take-over. Two groups of soldiers under Free Officer command were sent for training to Khor Orner, at the base of the Kerrari hills north of Omdurman (the site of the famous Omdurman battle of 1898). They returned to the capital in relays, at half-hour intervals after midnight, to disconnect the telephone system, the second to take over army headquarters and arrest the army command as well as the politicians, prominent among them Azhari and Mahgoub. Then the bridges straddling the Nile were secured, and the radio and television centre occupied. In all, the coup-makers commanded two parachute units, an infantry unit and 424 soldiers deployed around the capital on training manoeuvres. It was a tiny force, and very thinly spread.

Then, the day after the coup, the regional commands, all of which had Free Officer cells working within them, declared their support for the Revolutionary Council. The only minister who had been contacted beforehand by the army officers was the new premier, Babiker Awadullah. All the other ministers learnt of their appointments over Radio Omdurman.

Not that the Sudan was altogether surprised to find itself once again in the midst of a coup d'etat. There had been coup speculation for months. There was on all sides a total disillusionment with the parties and politicians. Government was drifting aimlessly, virtually at a standstill in many ministries. The parties were unable to govern together or separately. The reunification of its two factions, which the Umma Party achieved in April 1969, was threatening the governing partnership between one of its factions and Azhari's party, which was itself threatened by new internal splits. One government marriage of convenience was breaking up in violent mutual recriminations; but what would replace it? Al-Hadi and Azhari had agreed that the Islamic Constitution be promulgated by year-end, and that, if the formal drafting was not complete, its remaining articles be taken to referendum. A presidential system of government, which would have placed considerable power in the hands of al-Hadi or Azhari, whichever of the two was successful, excited much alarm, as did the Islamic Constitution, with its final block to any solution of the Southern troubles. The army was apprehensive, and in all probability divided. The judiciary had been alienated from the government in a long series of manoeuvres by politicians to outlaw the Communist Party and unseat its MPs. Babiker Awadullah had resigned the Chief Justiceship in a last stand on principle over this issue, when a parliamentary motion prejudged a case taken to the High Court for decision. Above all, the cost of living was soaring, the economy was stagnant and the politicians utterly discredited.

As the year opened, Ahmed Suleiman (who had been the representative of the Communist Party in the Transitional government), wrote a series of articles in *Al Ayyam*, in which he dissected the October 1964 experience. The only way out for the Sudan, he argued, was a similar coalition, but under army

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protection this time. Others on the Left warned against adventurism at a time of ebb and not flow in the radical movement of the Sudan. The coup was initiated by the non-Communist members of the Free Officer Movement. The Communist Party's response to it was cautious on the first day; but by the third, the party threw its weight behind the mobilization of popular forces in defence of the new government. Committees in Defence of the Revolution started to take form, though they were subsequently ordered to dissolve by the government: no political formations of any type were to be permitted independent of Revolutionary Council initiative. A week after the coup, gigantic demonstrations marched through Khartoum in support of the Revolutionary Council. Of the popular enthusiasm in the towns for the new regime, there was no doubt. Several dozen politicians were taken into detention, among them Azhari and Mabgoub, and Sadiq al-Mahdi; but support for the new regime was growing among the rank and file of the former NUP and **PDP**. Imam al-Hadi and his leading men, however, placed themselves on Aba Island, the base of Mabdism in the White Nile. The whole country was aware that the principal source of challenge to the new regime lay with the Ansar, and with Umma Party followers who had enlisted in the army for just such a confrontation as the one now looming. The new regime would be seriously threatened, if there were any signs of relapse in the army. Its top command layer, the generals and brigadiers, were pensioned off; and, with them, some middle-ranking officers who had been associated with Free Officer action in 1964 but not in 1969. The highest ranks of the police force were purged; then the civil service and the judiciary. Side by side with the lists of officers removed from command, was a shorter list of officers reinstated after dismissals in previous years intended to 'weaken the armed forces'. This time the army was taking no chances of Trojan horse activities from within. Alone among the nine officer members of the Revolutionary Council (seven of whom were under the age of thirty-two) Nimeiry accepted promotion; the others publicly declined. As the new regime proclaimed its general policy, it also addressed itself directly to the army with a ten-point soldiers' charter.<sup>34</sup>

## *A Putsch with a Popular Front*

Inside the new government among the soldiers of the Revolutionary Council, and outside in the movements of the Left there were insistent pressures for the speedy launching of a new political movement. Unlike their counterparts in Egypt's Free Officer Movement, they wanted this sooner rather than later. This, they were adamant, would be the only way to guard the Sudanese revolution.

After the first excited but nervous weeks, the threat of an immediate counter-move seemed to recede, and the new government bent its back to the tasks of running the country. Three tests would be all-decisive: the revival of an economy dangerously undiversified and stagnant; the unity of the army, and its alliance with its civilian allies for a programme of social revolution still to be elaborated in detail; and the Southern crisis, for this had been the test of each of the Sudan's successive governments, and each, in turn, had failed it.

A fortnight after the new regime had taken power, the Revolutionary Council and the Council of Ministers held a joint meeting to recognize the right of Southerners to regional autonomy within a united Sudan. The official announcement recorded that the past had left historical differences between North and South; but the government believed that unity could be built. Southern leaders had contributed to the crisis by seeking alliances with reactionary Northern politicians; with a revolutionary government in power new prospects for real independence for the peoples of the South, and in all the Sudan, were now at last open.

The Sudan's May 1969 revolution was consolidated in the counter-revolution. The defeat of the Ansar rising led by Imam al-Hadi opened the way to the re-distribution of the private estates of the White Nile among the peasantry. This policy, and that of the nationalization of banks and foreign trading firms which war; announced on the first anniversary of the Nimeiry government, was to break the economic power of the traditional political parties. The key to the Sudan revolution remains the site of popular power: will it lie, essentially, in the army or in the forces of the Sudan's organized Left? The coming period will decide.

## 2. NIGERIA

### The Coup of the Young Majors

Then Major Nzeogwu threw a smart military salute. 'I will be back in time for polo on Saturday,' he said as he climbed into his car – a vehicle still carrying the familiar crest of the former Governor.

*New Nigerian*, 20 January 1966

A senior Northern expatriate civil servant saw Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu at his headquarters the day after the coup. The desk before the military commander, he said, was bare of papers; there were no incoming telephone calls and the major made no outgoing ones during the interview, and he appeared to have no idea of what was involved in the take-over of government. What were his instructions to the civil service? Were they to report for duty on Monday? the expatriate administrator asked. Were the schools to open as usual? Yes, yes, of course, the major said, all was to run as normal. He listened attentively when told that if he wanted the administration to continue as it was, he should instruct it accordingly. **I**t was only after this that Northern civil servants were summoned for instructions, and Major Nzeogwu held a press conference at brigade headquarters to announce that permanent secretaries – among them the head of the service, who had feared for his life the night before, **i**n the conviction that his name was on the coup-makers' extermination list – would assume the duties previously held by the ministers of the old regime. **I**n Kaduna the coup, led personally by Nzeogwu, had been swiftly effective by contrast with the bungling of the young majors in the South; but throughout most of the critical first day after take-over, Nzeogwu acted as though the plans of the coup-makers not only for seizing, but for holding power, had been very far from adequately conceived,

or were in suspense pending developments at Lagos. There, however, the coup had failed.

It had begun to unfold under cover of several army parties in Lagos on the Friday evening of 14 January 1966. The main party was given at the Ikoyi house of Brigadier Maimalari, for staff officers going on postings; and another was on board the Elder Dempster mailboat *Auerol*, then in harbour at Apapa, for which Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi left the first party early. Major Mobalaje Johnson saw a group of junior officers converging on the house of Major Ifeajuna towards midnight, but he thought nothing of it at the time ;<sup>1</sup> thirteen young officers, some of them members of the inner planning circle, and others selected to take part, were about to receive their last-minute briefing, it subsequently appeared. The coup-makers operated in several detachments in the capital: some were detailed to round up and shoot the senior army commanders; others, to arrest the prime minister and the Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh; others, to occupy police headquarters control room and the telephone exchange. According to Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, who was in charge of the Lagos operation, the plan was to kidnap the Federal prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and compel him to broadcast his resignation, with a transfer of power to the young officers,<sup>2</sup> so giving the new regime a spurious legitimacy. Chief Awolowo would then have been released from prison to head an interim government.<sup>3</sup> A flat in Lagos had been selected to record the prime minister's announcement. The broadcast, the signal for which Nzeogwu was waiting that week-end and for which he delayed his own radio announcement that Kaduna had been seized, was never made.

The Lagos coup-makers went into action two hours after midnight. They used service troops from Apapa barracks, but intended to rally the Federal Guard which Major D. Okafor commanded; and they hoped that once the coup was under way, 2 Brigade at Ikeja, where Ifeajuna was brigade-major, would declare for them, or at the least stay neutral. But their operation was barely launched when General Ironsi began to mobilize a counter-action of the army. He had returned from his Apapa

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party after an armed group had called unsuccessfully at his home to arrest him. And he had no sooner entered his house, when he was alerted by a telephone call from Lieutenant-Colonel Pam's wife, made moments after her husband had been taken away by soldiers. Less than an hour and a half after the coup-makers had gone into action, General Ironsi arrived at police headquarters. He entered the lobby holding a pistol in his hand and demanded to know from the two soldiers on duty what they were doing there; he then ordered them to return to their barracks immediately, and added that he was turning out 2 Battalion to attack the men then engaged on unlawful operations in Lagos. At Ikeja, Ironsi roused the regimental sergeant-major of 2 Battalion, had the alarm sounded and the troops fall in, and then cleared this with the commander of the battalion,

Colonel H. Njoku. Troops from Ikeja were immediately posted outside key points in the city. General Ironsi then moved on to the barracks of the Presidential Guard, and after bringing the Guard out on parade, took a detachment of soldiers to Apapa for duty. Not long after Ironsi's instructions to the Guard, Major Okafor arrived at the barracks and tried to rally them for the coup. He was confronted by the regimental sergeant-major who told him that Ironsi had already been there, and had instructed him to shoot Okafor if he came; since Okafor was his senior, however, he was giving him a warning.<sup>4</sup>

In a few hours of frantic activity about the capital, the coup-makers had secured several of their targets. Troops under the command of Ifeajuna had arrested the Federal prime minister in his house at more or less the same time that Chief Okotie-Eboh, the wealthy Finance Minister who more than any other figure of the regime personified its corruption, was 'brought from his house close to hysteria and screaming "Don't shoot me", and was flung into a fast car like an old army sack'.<sup>5</sup> Both men were murdered the same night. Brigadier Maimalari had escaped the first attempt to kill him; but, on his way by foot to the Federal Guard headquarters at Dodan barracks, he had seen the car of Ifeajuna, his brigade-major; had shouted to him to stop; and had been shot by him on the spot. Ifeajuna had also burst into the Ikoyi Hotel to kill Lieutenant-Colonel Largema, commander of 4 Battalion stationed at Ibadan, who was in Lagos on a special mission, assumed to be connected with the Sardauna-Akintola planned army action in the Western Region. But as the hours flew by, it had become obvious to the young majors, speeding frantically about the capital to complete their assignments, that the operation had failed. Ironsi had escaped their net and was organizing 2 Battalion at Ikeja; their plan to move armoured cars of the Reconnaissance Squadron from Abeokuta to Lagos, so as to seize the airport and the barracks of 2 Battalion, had patently misfired. The coup-makers decided to take over. Ifeajuna made a hurried trip to the Eastern Region where, according to the coup plans, he was to arrest leading politicians. But it was already too late. After midnight,

when the coup was getting under way in Lagos, Kaduna and Ibadan, the adjutant in charge of ■ Battalion at Enugu, a Northerner, received a signalled message that he was to arrest the ministers. When he tried to confirm with headquarters in Lagos, he found that communications were not working. Wrestling with an instruction that he found incredible but which he was unable to have confirmed or contradicted, he decided to do the minimum and throw a restraining cordon round the houses of the ministers. When they woke on Saturday morning, they found their homes under guard. But it was not long before Major David Ejoor arrived from Lagos to take command: Ironsi had commandeered a plane to carry Ejoor to Enugu, thus forestalling Ifeajuna and Okafor who were still on their way, travelling by road in a Mercedes.s Ifeajuna stayed briefly in Enugu – where he is said to have had a conversation with the Eastern premier, Dr Michael Okpara; though by the Saturday afternoon of the coup week-end, the ministers and the politicians had begun judiciously to melt away from the capital, to homes or friends in the country- and then travelled back to Ibadan in the West. There he lived under cover for a few days, before travelling on to Accra in disguise via Cotonou and Lome, In Ghana he asked for and was given an interview with Nkrumah. His request was for arms and a hundred men to finish off the coup. But Ghana, the first country to do so, had recognized Nigeria's new government three days after the coup. By then the army's counter-operation had succeeded, and Nkrumah is said<sup>7</sup> to have calculated that an army government could not but be an improvement on the old regime; besides, recognition by Ghana, and other African states, would forestall any British attempt to reinstate the previous Cabinet, or what was left of it.

At Ibadan, in the Western Region, on the night of the coup, Chief Akintola had put up a spirited fight with an automatic rifle until shot dead. The soldiers drove off with his deputy Chief Fani Kayode in their car; but by the time that they reached Lagos and Dodan barracks, the army had taken control. The soldiers were arrested, and a badly frightened Fani Kayode was released.

No plans seem to have been laid for carrying the coup into

the Mid-West, the smallest of the regions, where no troops were stationed.

In Kaduna, Major Nzeogwu, instructor at the Military Academy, had been mounting exercises for men of 3 Battalion for fully a week before the night of I4-I5 January. To the brigade commander, Brigadier Ademulegun, these seemed merely routine; as they seemed to people in Kaduna town and its environs, who grew used to the sight of armed soldiers moving about the area in broad daylight, and sometimes by night. There was not the least suspicion that Major Nzeogwu was staging careful pre-coup rehearsals. During one of the manoeuvres, the Sardauna had been seen watching the soldiers from a window.<sup>8</sup> On the evening of the coup, Nzeogwu left the Academy with a detachment of soldiers and on the road some distance from barracks told them, for the first time, of the night's assignment. 'Any man had the chance to drop out. More than that; they had bullets. They had been issued with their weapons but I was unarmed. If they disagreed, they could have shot me.'<sup>9</sup> There were four targets: Government House, where the governor, Sir Kashim Ibrahim, was put under guard; the Northern premier's residence; the house of Brigadier Ademulegun; and the house of Colonel Shodeinde, his deputy. At the Northern premier's house, Nzeogwu and his men met resistance, and a gun battle ensued before the Sardauna, one of his wives, and several members of his security guard and personal staff lay dead. Perhaps because they were short of personnel, the coup-makers did not synchronize their attacks on all four targets, but moved from one to another, so that the operation took several hours. Even while it was still in progress, the news began to leak out. A visitor in the Sardauna's guest house saw the main building ablaze and rang the head of the civil service, who alerted the commissioner of police. At police headquarters they spent some time trying to decide who could be behind the trouble. Soldiers had been seen at the premier's house: could Brigadier Ademulegun, a Westerner in command in the North, be staging a coup ? By the time that police headquarters decided to check with the brigadier, he had already been shot, and his wife beside him. A telephone call was made to alert Colonel

Shodeinde. But as he replaced the telephone, the coup-makers burst in and shot him.\* In the North, unlike the South, the coup was going according to plan. Even members of the Air Force training squadron at Kaduna were alerted on their side. A young second-lieutenant of the air force undertook to ensure that none of the senior officers would be in a position to use aircraft against the coup-makers; three senior officers were detained in guard-room cells for several days until released on the orders of Major Nzeogwu.

Nzeogwu broadcast over Radio Kaduna just after noon on Saturday 15 January. He spoke in the name of the Supreme Council of the Revolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces, to declare martial law over the Northern provinces of Nigeria.

The constitution is suspended, and the regional government and elected assembly are hereby dissolved [he said]. 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. . . . As an interim measure, all permanent secretaries, corporation chairmen and similar heads of departments are allowed to make decisions until new organs are functioning, so long as such decisions are not contrary to the aims and wishes of the Supreme Council. No minister or parliamentary secretary possesses administrative or other forms of control over any ministry, even if they are not considered too

\*The fifteen casualties of the coup included the prime minister of the Federation; his Finance Minister, Chief Okotie-Eboh; the premier and most powerful man of the North, Sir Ahmadu Bello; the premier of the Western region, Chief Akintola; and seven senior army officers. Of these, four were Northerners: Brigadier Z. Maimalari, commander 2 Brigade, Apapa, Lagos; Colonel Kuru Mohammed, deputy-commandant Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna; Lieutenant-Colonel A. Largema, commanding officer 4 Battalion, Ibadan; and Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Pam, the adjutant-general. Two were Westerners: Brigadier S. A. Ademulegun, commander 1 Brigade, Kaduna; Colonel S. A. Shodeinde, commandant Military Training College, Kaduna; and one an Easterner (Ibo): Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Unegbe, quartermaster general at army headquarters in Lagos, who was shot when he refused to hand over the keys of the armoury to the coup makers in the early hours of coup-day.

## *The Coup of the Young Majors*

dangerous to be arrested. This is not a time for long speechmaking, so let me acquaint you with the ten proclamations of the extraordinary order of the day which the Supreme Council has promulgated. These will be modified as the situation improves. You are hereby warned that looting, arson, homosexuality and rape, embezzlement, bribery or corruption, obstruction of the revolution, sabotage, subversion, false alarm and assistance to foreign invaders are all offences punishable by death sentences. Demonstrations, unauthorized assemblies, non-cooperation with the revolutionary troops are punishable in varying manner up to death.

Then followed a long catalogue of diverse other offences, from spying, doubtful loyalty, shouting of slogans, loitering and rowdy behaviour, smuggling, or attempts to escape with documents or valuables or state assets, to wavering or sitting on the fence and failing to declare open loyalty for the revolution.

Our enemies [said Major Nzeogwu] are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in the 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 and VPs of waste; the tribalists, the nepotists; those that made the country look big-for-nothing before the international circles; those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds... We promise that you will no more be ashamed to say that you are a Nigerian.\*

Two hours after Nzeogwu's broadcast, Lagos went on the air to announce that the prime minister had been kidnapped by 'a dissident section of the army', but the bulle of the army was loyal, and the 'ill-advised mutiny' would soon be at an end. The Federal Parliament held a brief and jittery session on the Saturday morning, attended by no more than thirty-three of the 312 members, mostly N C N C; it adjourned for lack of a quorum. Several senior Cabinet members and the attorney-general were

\*Text of broadcast taken from a tape of the speech by Major Chukuma Nzeogwu over Radio Kaduna on 15 January 1966, starting at about rz.30 P.M. Apart from remarks made at press conferences and another sketchy interview from Calabar prison in *Dnm*, September 1966, this was the only public statement of the aims of the coup made by its organizers, until in May 1967, over a year after its defeat, Major Nzeogwu gave an interview to *Africa and the World* from Enugu.

summoned to a meeting with senior police officials at the Obalende police headquarters, where General Ironsi had taken up command: the police had just recently installed a new communications system, and it was on reports coming over the police wires and on British High Commission sources that Lagos was relying at this stage. The British High Commissioner, Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce, sat in on that emergency consultation and was privy to various crucial decisions that week-end: notably, the decision to hand over to the army, a course probably advised by High Commission personnel. The news of the coup had split the Cabinet into two factions, on UPGA-NNA lines, which caucused separately during most of the two days after the coup. Then, when these met together in several emergency sessions, the Cabinet dissolved in indecision and finally -under British High Commission, army and police security pressure to let the army handle a dangerous situation - was eclipsed, altogether. An American visitor to Lagos at the time of the coup watched photographers get a picture of the British High Commissioner's Rolls-Royce outside police headquarters where Ironsi had established his command post, and quoted a visiting British journalist's remark: 'They still depend on us, you know, even when they are sorting out a private revolution of their own.'

When Ironsi officially broke the news of the army revolt to the rump of the Cabinet, 'he appeared genuinely shocked'. And 'We (the Cabinet) were in confusion'. Through police channels, if not officially (the British High Commissioner denied to newspapers the existence of any official request), the Cabinet members asked the British government for assistance. This, they were informed, would have to be put in writing over the signature of a head of government. The prime minister was missing, and the president, Dr Azikiwe, had been on extended convalescent leave in Britain since October 1965. A worried acting president, Dr Orizu, spent the week-end on the telephone trying to get clear instructions from Dr Azikiwe; and the rest of the Cabinet caucused over their respective candidates for prime minister. The NPC-NNDP men wanted Dipcharima, a former Minister of Transport and the most senior minister

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available, while the NCNC was pushing the candidature of Mbadiwe, Minister of Trade. The attorney-general suggested that the best course would be to appoint the most senior minister as successor to the missing premier. The Cabinet was due to assemble on the Sunday evening to make a decision. By the late afternoon, however, Major-General Ironsi had told several senior ministers that the army considered the situation so grave as to warrant a take-over. It was reported that Major Nzeogwu was preparing to march on Lagos, while Colonel Ojukwu, in charge of the Kana garrison, was accusing the general of losing valuable time and was urging that the army act.\* Three hours later, at a brief Cabinet meeting attended by Major-General Ironsi, Admiral Weyand Police Commissioner Kam Salem, with perhaps half the thirty-two members of the Cabinet (the rest could not be found and had probably left Lagos by then, in considerable apprehension at the fate of politicians), it was decided to hand over the administration of the country as a temporary measure to the army and the police under the control of Major-General Ironsi. The Cabinet meeting was presided over by Dipcharima, and the handing-over document was signed by Dipcharima and Mbadiwe. The decision was broadcast to the nation ten minutes before midnight, when Major-General Ironsi, as Supreme Commander of the Military Government, announced decrees for the suspension of the office of president, prime minister and Parliament, and a military government in each region responsible to the Federal military government. The Cabinet members were divided and demoralized. Arguing from hindsight months later, they attributed sinister motives to Ironsi; but at the time they were slow to rally in the face of crisis. And

\*Klaus W. Stephan, in *The Nigerian Misunderstanding* (Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation, ■■September 1967), says he has a tape-recorded statement by Ojukwu to the effect that he had requested General Gowon to crush the coup.

Ojukwu said, in an unpublished interview with Suzanne Cronje, in Enugu, 8 April 1967: 'On January 15 I was the one who advised Ironsi to stand at the Head of the Army, call for support and then organize the various *units* that would immediately support, so that the rebels who were bound to be few and already committed would suddenly find that the whole thing was phasing away.'

it is exceedingly doubtful whether a refurbished Cabinet of politicians would have been accepted by the country at large; for even before the position had cleared and it was known who was in control, the news of the attack on politicians had unleashed a wild mood of celebration.

At the time of Ironsi's broadcast on the military assumption of power, however, Nigeria had not one, but two army governments. In Kaduna, his arm bandaged from injuries sustained in the mortar attack on the premier's house, Major Nzeogwu had given his press conference at brigade headquarters on the Sunday morning. He was adamant that the operation he had led in Kaduna was not a mutiny. 'In a mutiny you have undisciplined troops,' he said; <sup>12</sup> 'there is no indiscipline here.' On the execution of the coup in the South, Nzeogwu was explosively angry. They had bungled the whole thing, he said. **If** he had had his way, he'd have killed the Eastern premier, Dr Michael Okpara, and Osadabey, the premier of the Mid-West; and he would do so still, if he could. Asked his opinion about Dr Azikiwe, he replied, 'Zik is a rogue.' <sup>13</sup> Apart from the press conference, he had spent the morning consulting with the North's top civil servants. The first matter they raised was the detention of the Northern governor, Sir Kashim Ibrahim, who was under army guard in State House. Was it necessary to hold him? Nzeogwu agreed immediately that he be released. The governor had been 'a complete gentleman', Nzeogwu said, and had received honourable treatment while under arrest.<sup>14</sup> (It did not enter Nzeogwu's mind that holding the governor hostage would be a trump card in negotiations with Lagos and army headquarters.) At the press conference, too, Nzeogwu announced that government would be administered by the permanent secretaries. 'We have experts to do the job rather than profiteers,' he said. Sir Kashim Ibrahim had signed a declaration transferring all powers previously held by him to the commander, and this made the proper appointment of a government possible. Top administrators who the week before had manned the Sardauna's administration, offered no resistance to being co-opted into the administration of Nzeogwu's Supreme Council. At the press conference, Nzeogwu said that it was not the inten-

tion of the military to remain in office permanently. They were simply dedicated to the efficient administration of law and order.

Nzeogwu was establishing a government, but he was only partly in power; he had already partly lost control, not only because of the Ironsi-headed government take-over in Lagos, but also because of complications within the North itself. In Kano, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odurnegwu Ojukwu, the officer commanding 5 Battalion, seized the airport as soon as he had news of the events on the night of 14-15 January. By mid-morning on the Saturday, he had sent for the heads of the administration and had had the Emir of Kano brought to his headquarters to rally and consolidate his authority in the city; but not for the coup. **If** he was watching and waiting to see the outcome of the Nzeogwu seizure, he said and did nothing that conveyed his support of it. When Ojukwu sent a group of soldiers to the emir's palace, they came not to arrest him but to serve as escort to army headquarters. There the emir found Ojukwu trying to contact Lagos and Kaduna for the latest news of the situation. 'My impression,' said the emir, 's 'was that he was not part of the coup. He said he would take no orders from the young majors. He explained that he had had me brought to his headquarters so that he could tell me personally what he knew, and I would not have to depend on rumours. I was not under arrest. He told me that there had been an army coup, and he wanted my help in keeping passions down. He was trying to get up-to-date reports on the situation.' At the suggestion of the provincial secretary, the emir broadcast an appeal for calm and order. Later in the week Major Nzeogwu, still in control of Kaduna, though his removal was imminent as authority in Lagos began to move, had a serious problem on his hands. The following Thursday was army pay day; and to meet the large cash requirements, the administration had to draw specie from the Central Bank in Kano and transfer it to Kaduna banks. The Kaduna banks were worried that the soldiers would literally leap over the counters for their pay. (When banks opened on Monday, they restricted general withdrawals of cash to £50.) The problem was raised with Nzeogwu at the meeting he had

on Sunday at 11 A.M. with the permanent secretaries. 'Oh,' he said, 'there's no problem; just bring it.' Would he order the road-blocks to let it through? No need for orders or explanations, he said; 'I am in control.' In Kano, however, Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu refused to permit the banks to send the money through. From Kaduna Major Nzeogwu sent an air force plane with an official on board to explain and negotiate; the plane was impounded by Colonel Ojukwu. The money did not reach the Kaduna military administration until General Ironsi was fully in control, and the new military governor of the North, Colonel Katsina, had been installed.<sup>16</sup>

Nzeogwu's Supreme Council of the Revolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces remained in effective government barely three days. By the end of the week-end, Lagos had rallied an alternative central authority; and, on receipt of information that Nzeogwu's forces were likely to march south, had deployed the Ibadan garrison across the main road to the north in a ring of mortar positions. It looked as though the Nigerian army was about to go to war with itself. But as the new week opened, army headquarters in Lagos and the young major in Kaduna started negotiations, and terms were hammered out on the army communications network for a surrender of authority by Nzeogwu. At midday on the Tuesday, Nzeogwu announced that he would accept the authority of the Ironsi regime on five conditions. These were: (1) a safe conduct for himself and all his officers and men; (2) a guarantee of freedom from legal proceedings now or later; (3) an assurance that the politicians whom they had fought to remove would not be returned to office; (4) compensation to be paid to the families of officers and men killed in the uprising; and (5) the release of all his officers and men arrested in Western Nigeria. At a press conference in Kaduna at which acceptance of these terms was announced, Major Nzeogwu said:

We have pledged allegiance to General Ironsi on behalf of all the men who were, for some unknown reasons, referred to as 'rebels'. We feel that it is absurd that men who risked their lives to establish the new regime should be held prisoners. We wanted to change the government for the benefit of everybody else. We were concerned with what was

best for Nigeria. Our action made the Supreme Commander, and he should recognise usY

The major said that five men in the inner circle had planned the action. But most of those concerned in the revolution were Northerners. 'It was a truly Nigerian gathering. Only in the army do you get true Nigerianism.'

At one of his last public appearances, Major Nzeogwu appeared side by side with the newly appointed military governor of the North, Major Katsina. They told a curious tale of reversed fortunes in the three days since the coup. It was after the attack on the Northern premier's house, said Nzeogwu, that he had called on Major Katsina and demanded: 'What side are you on? Are you with me, or are you with them?' Major Katsina had replied: 'Don't bother. I'm on your side.' Major Nzeogwu said that he would always remember how, at the crucial moment, Major Katsina had been on his side. Major Katsina returned the amiability. Waving his hand towards Major Nzeogwu, he said: 'As you see, I am still alive. I will be here for many years yet. I am proud to have a chance to help save my country. We respect each other. I have been able to help Major Nzeogwu with some of his problems during the past few days. I am his good friend and I am sure he will now help me. We will work together for the betterment of our country.'<sup>18</sup> The new military governor and the man who led the army coup hook hands outside brigade headquarters; Katsina was bound for Lagos to meet the newly appointed military governors.

Sent to escort Nzeogwu to Lagos under a guarantee of safe conduct from General Ironsi was Lieutenant-Colonel C. D. Nwawo, flown to Nigeria from London the night before. He had been Major Nzeogwu's superior officer at the Military Training College. 'I don't think he would have left Kaduna with any other man at this time,' said Lieutenant-Colonel Nwawo. Nzeogwu said that he had no worries about the repercussions from the coup. 'My only worry is that I did not have time to tell my men that I was leaving. I would have liked to have said a proper goodbye.'<sup>19</sup> Major Nzeogwu was seen in Lagos for a few days thereafter. Then he disappeared. He and the other participants in the attempted coup, including Major Ifeajuna, whose

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return to Nigeria from Ghana Colonel Ojukwu helped to negotiate,<sup>20</sup> were arrested and detained in eight different prisons throughout the country. Their fate while in detention was one of the several issues that racked and finally broke the Ironsi government.

### AN IBO PLOT?

An Ibo plot? Propaganda, then credibility, and at last Nigeria itself fragmented on the issue of the January coup. The army regime headed by General Ironsi began in a burst of popular euphoria that the rotten past was gone for ever. That illusion was dispelled within a few months. The country ranged itself into two hostile camps, each with a totally incompatible view of the January coup. Much said and done over the ensuing year and a half drove the two camps to open breach and then to war. As the country tottered from one crisis to the next and more serious one, so the different official versions of events solidified and justified all done in the name of each. The January coup was the departure point for disaster, for – it was said in the official Nigerian version – it was an Ibo plan for Ibo domination. After the initial 'Ibo' conspiracy, the coup seven months later in July, directed against Ibos, was 'the natural course of events'. (More than one senior civil servant, as well as young army officers in the Federation, used this precise phrase.) What Ibos did or are supposed to have done that week-end in January became, in time, justification for eliminating them: first in the army; then in the North; and finally as the enemy in war.

The full story of the Nigerian coups will probably never be known. Two opposite official accounts have grown up and with them a tangled undergrowth of popular belief.\* Gossip and rumour, eye-witness and circumstantial account have become legend in the telling, and legend has calcified into war propa-

\*One instance, current among Northerners, but not exclusive to them: Brigadier Maimalari escaped assassination on the night of the coup and went into hiding in Dahomey. From there, a fortnight later, he telephoned General Ironsi, and then returned. He was then shot down in cold blood, and the autopsy showed forty-seven bullet wounds. This rankled deep among his men and an act of revenge became inevitable. The fact is that Brigadier Maimalari was killed on the night of the coup.

ganda. Rumour should be brushed aside as evidence, but in an atmosphere both rancorous and gullible, it becomes reality: what people believe, regardless of hard evidence, becomes cause for action. How is one to separate fact from legend and propaganda? Every member of the Nigerian elite – civil servant, university lecturer, engineer, Lagosian socialite – and every student in London and New York, not to talk of Ibadan and Ife, Nsukka, Zaria and Lagos, has an elaborate version of most incidents. Each version is impressive in the telling: until you hear the next version, and the contradictions glare. Few who recount the events of January will admit any doubts of the full facts, or any gap in the sequence of cause (Ibo plotting) and effect (Ibo domination, which was thwarted seven months later by the counter-coup).

There exists, in a government safe at Lagos, a draft White Paper on the January coup, of which only a few pages have ever been published. It was ordered by decision of the Executive Council under the Ironsi regime. It was drafted on the strength of intelligence and security reports, after the young majors and their associates in the January coup\* had been exhaustively interrogated during the months that they were held in detention by the Ironsi government. Apart from the investigation conducted by the Ironsi regime, the Gowon government undertook to issue a White Paper on the events leading to the change of

• Almost all the leading figures of January are now dead. Nzeogwu died in the battle for Ubolo-Eke, near Nsukka. His body was given full military honours by the Federal forces though, report or legend tells, not before Northern soldiers had plucked out his eyes so that he 'would never see the North again'. Major Okafor, who was detained at Benin, was buried alive by Northern troops during the July coup. Major Anuforo was also killed in the July coup. Major Ifeajuna, the vacillating hero, was later shot as a traitor in Biafra after the invasion of the Mid-West. Major Chukuka died in prison in the Mid-West when Northern soldiers held the warders at gunpoint during the July coup. Captain Oji was killed in action on the Biafran side in February 1968. In August 1968 it was thought that Major Ademoyega was serving in the Biafran army. Nzeogwu talked freely to friends who visited him in prison during 1966 and again when he was in Enugu, helping at Abaliki to train the army of what would soon be proclaimed Biafra, but no systematic account of his version exists in writing. He made no bones of his opposition to secession and, for some while during 1967, was put under restriction by Ojukwu.

government in both January and July.<sup>22</sup> This White Paper has not appeared to date. As the Federal version was put out only after the July coup had taken place, it is not surprising that it served to justify that second coup. Publication of the full report was stopped at the insistence of the Eastern region, when it looked as though agreement might emerge from Aburi and other negotiations at the beginning of 1967. The Federal government agreed that an account of the January coup would rekindle old wounds. (Though, curiously, when wounds were bleeding freely in the fighting and the propaganda war that accompanied it, the White Paper revelations were still withheld.) But in January 1967, enough of the report was published by the Gowon government in *Nigeria 1966* to show that it interpreted the coup as an Ibo plot, and treated events going back to 1964 as part of that plot.

Certain officers in the Nigerian army sought to use the army created for the defence of the fatherland and the promotion of the citizen to attain purely political ends . . . . As far back as December 1964, a small group of army officers mainly from the Ibo ethnic group of the Eastern region began to plot, in collaboration with some civilians, the overthrow of what was then the Government of the Federation of Nigeria and the eventual assumption of power in the country.

Booklets published by the Northern regional government and another by the Current Issues Society<sup>23</sup> went considerably further on the subject of the Ibo plot. Claiming to be a dispassionate and forthright account of how the Ibos, 'through their devilish determination to dominate or break up Nigeria, plunged the country into crisis', this version asserts that the 'North's record was one of restraint and compromise in the face of unprecedented acts of provocation which eventually did succeed in momentarily stretching beyond breaking point the monumental imperturbability of Northern Nigerians'. The January mutiny was no mutiny,

but a premeditated and carefully projected plan by the Ibos to impose themselves on the other tribes of Nigeria. It was the culmination of an effort, the fulfilment of a dream and the realisation of a hope long entertained by the Ibo tribe in Nigeria.

Countless elaborations of this version exist. The general assumption is that every Ibo is guilty, if not by act then by association with his ethnic group. Azikiwe, Ojukwu, Ironsi, Nzeogwu are all Ibos: therefore, whatever overt acts they committed, they must all have been privy to the plot; and if their behaviour should appear to have deviated from the purposes of other conspirators, this is either because the enormity of the plot was not at first fully revealed, or because their behaviour was deliberately calculated to confuse those of other tribes. So, it is said, General Ironsi tricked the Cabinet into ceding power to the army under his command. (This ignores the fact that the Cabinet was too divided and demoralized to hold the government together.) If Ironsi's actions were loyal during the three crucial days following the coup attempt, this was because 'the role assigned to him was to appear to be taken by surprise'. Supporters of the government find it hard to understand why 'the government has not released the information it has. The Northern Government has a tape-recording of Ironsi's voice outlining the plans for the coup. It's incredible to me that Gowon has not released the proof he has of civilian involvement in the coup planning.'<sup>24</sup> Never mind that it was General Ironsi's rallying of the army that smothered the Nzeogwu-led coup; the fact that the general emerged at the head of the military government made it an Ibo coup. Colonel Ojukwu was also part of the plot.\* In Kaduna top-ranking security officials spread the report that Ojukwu was in the city while the coup was being executed in the early hours of Saturday morning. Some embellish the account by saying that he personally led the attack on the Sardauna's residence; others, that 'Ojukwu pushed the young men into action'. But why, if Ojukwu was privy to the coup, did he prevent Kaduna, under Nzeogwu's control, from making withdrawals for army pay from Kano banks? Ah, said Major Hassan Katsina, who conceded Ojukwu's obstruction of

\*The *New York Herald Tribune* of 19 October 1966 reported: 'Before Major Nzeogwu surrendered his three-day control of the Northern region . . . he declared flatly that if Colonel Ojukwu had joined him, the take-over would have succeeded.' Instead, the report added, Ojukwu remained loyal to Ironsi who put down the mutiny, jailed the plotters and named Ojukwu military governor of the East.

Nzeogwu that week: 'They had fallen out by then.' Why, if it was an Ibo plot for domination, did General Ironsi appoint Colonel Katsina military governor of the North and not Ojukwu, the commander of the Kano garrison and the obvious choice for strong man? 'Oh, you don't know the Ibo – man.' Above all else, the Federal version insists, the coup must be judged by 'the pattern of the killings'. No Ibo died apart from Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Unegbe, who was killed trying to guard the keys of the armoury; and his death was clearly an incidental casualty, which did not alter the planned pattern of the killings.

The first press suggestion that January was an Ibo coup open to Northern reprisals was made by the BBC correspondent, who beat the news blackout on coup day and mentioned that all the young majors seemed to be Ibo.<sup>25</sup> A week after the coup, the *Sunday Times*<sup>26</sup> asked 'Can Ironsi Hold Nigeria?'

According to reliable evidence, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, head of the military government, has a list of seventy further notables (apart from the Sardauna of Sokoto and the Prime Minister) who have disappeared, largely Northern leaders again.\* Ramadan, the Muslim fast period, closes at the end of the month with religious celebrations which could easily lead to violence. And the Northerners would have plenty of Ibo targets . . . for despite Nigeria's sharp geographical divisions, the Ibos, the most adaptable of the tribes, have spread through the nation as workers, traders and officials.

Perhaps some of the toppled politicians were thinking such things in the jubilant weeks immediately after the coup; but none of them dared to say so publicly. Only when the wound inflicted by January turned septic in the Nigerian body politic did this version of events catch the old tribal infection. Every event, every individual action, had to be fitted into a grand theory of conspiracy. The trouble was that all did not fit easily; for there was more than one conspiracy, and more than one level of commitment within any one conspiracy. The fact that there were Ibos among the lieutenant-colonels of 1964 who contemplated intervening in the government crisis, and among the majors of the 1966 coup, does not make this a continuous thread of conspiracy. An army intervention in 1964 would have

\*This was quite inaccurate – *author*.

been aimed at entrenching President Azikiwe in power; the 1966 action was to topple him along with the rest of the government. The 1964 plot was initiated by Colonel Ojukwu; the 1966 one, he helped to crush.

The Nzeogwu coup was launched in an atmosphere of anti-government intrigue, in which blows against the Federal government might have been planned, if not executed, by several groups. President Azikiwe, in Britain ostensibly on convalescent leave, was demonstrably confused. He put out prompt feelers to General Ironsi about whether his return home would be welcome. He told the press that he would be going home. But he did not leave Europe for several months. In an unpublished interview,<sup>27</sup> he admitted that –like many Nigerians –he was expecting the government to be brought down by some act of political opposition. But from which quarter had it come? He delayed his return until he could be sure that he would be accommodated, or at least left alone. For several plots were in the making by the beginning of 1966, and the Nzeogwu-led coup seems to have been only one of them. The army was divided against itself so far that, when the coup started in Kaduna, high-ups in the civil service suspected that Brigadier Ademulegun, a Westerner in command in the North, might be behind it. Civil servants were widely said to be hatching their own plot; though this, said a young Northerner, 'was a coup that melted away'. In Nigeria, as in other African states, what young members of the elite would have liked to have done, only their counterparts in the army succeeded in doing.

To some observers, the young majors' coup was the outcome of planning, or at the least prompting, by UPGA politicians. Frustrated and embittered in opposition, UPGA might have had most to gain from a toppling of government. But if there was an UPGA plot brewing, it was not **thone** that chose as principal initiator Major Nzeogwu, who derided all politicians of the establishment equally. UPGA would, in any event, have been most unlikely to have tried initiating an army action at only the middle level of the officer corps. **If** the young officers had any direct political links, they were with young radicals scattered in the trade unions, the civil service, at the universities and

inside the Nigerian Youth Congress. This was a diffused and amorphous pressure group, with some members inside UP G A and others not; with associations both among young intellectuals and in the army among the young officers, especially Nzeogwu. As far as is known, only one of these young radicals was entrusted by Ifeajuna with the task of drafting the proclamation of the young officers' coup for broadcasting; and he could not be found on the crucial night.<sup>2s</sup>

The genesis of the plot apparently goes back to August 1965, when Majors Okafor and Ifeajuna and Captain O. Oji confided in one another their dissatisfaction with political developments in Nigeria and the impact of these on the army; they then set about searching for other officers who held similar views and might be prepared to act on them. Next to join the conspiracy were Major I. H. Chukuka and Major C. I. Anuforo, who brought in Major Nzeogwu. By early November, the inner circle seems to have comprised the above six men plus Major A. Ademoyega- a Yoruba officer, incidentally. Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu was a Mid-West Ibo but, as his middle name shows, had made the North his home, spoke fluent Hausa, and made all his closest friends among Northerners, who admired and respected him; though, unusually in a soldier, he was a puritanical man and a book-worm. He was a practising Catholic, of rebellious temperament. While at StJohn's College in Kaduna, he had clashed *with* the school authorities and been suspended from school so that he had had to write his West African School Certificate examination from home. His posting in the North had been a form of reprimand, after he had beaten up an expatriate major in an incident in Lagos. Ifeajuna and Ademoyega had been students together at Ibadan University. Ademoyega had been an Action Group official and possessed perhaps the closest links with politics. Ifeajuna was probably the best-known of the coup leaders, as Nigeria's Commonwealth Games gold medallist at Vancouver in 1954 (after which athletic victory he was feted and, said his critics, 'had his head turned'). Of all the coup-makers, apart from Nzeogwu, Ifeajuna had the closest connexion with the young Ibadan intellectuals and radicals. But his student record was not unblemished, and his contemporaries

in a student strike, of which he had been one of the ringleaders, never forgave him for having produced a forged medical certificate to get himself off the hook with authorities. In all, 200 men were arrested for their part in the conspiracy, of whom sixty played more prominent roles: among them, a Yoruba captain, an Ekoi captain, and two Yoruba second lieutenants.

Planning for the execution of the plot started in earnest in early November 1965, at a meeting of the inner circle which took place at Ifeajuna's house in Lagos. Nzeogwu does not appear to have been present. Captain E. Nwobosi, who was entrusted with the Ibadan coup operation, was drawn in only forty-eight hours before. What coordinating was done largely accompanied Ifeajuna's mobility as adjutant-general to Brigadier Maimalari. This emerges from Ifeajuna's version of the coup, written white-hot in Ghana where he sat out the immediate aftermath of 15 January until persuaded to surrender to Ironsi. • The version suggests some divergence of purpose among the planners. They could not agree, for instance, on the list of victims for their assassination list, and so it was left to the commanders of the various operations to make their decisions on the spot. Nzeogwu said:<sup>29</sup> 'It was agreed that the three Regional Prime Ministers should be seized and shot.' There had been no plans to harm the Federal premier. Commenting subsequently on the fact that the Eastern premier, Dr Okpara, had been left untouched, Major Nzeogwu said: 'We all started with the same spirit, but some got faint-hearted on the way.; Ifeajuna put the failures of the coup down to reliance on too small a group.ao 'We were rushing from one assignment to another, instead of being able to pull them all off simultaneously.' The

•The Ifeajuna manuscript has not been published and may be lost. At one time there were plans to publish it in Enugu, but Chinua Achebe, who was associated with this publishing venture, pronounced the manuscript worthless when he read it. Some of Ifeajuna's friends in Ibadan and Lagos had the manuscript briefly and nervously, and hastily got rid of it as the atmosphere in Nigeria turned against all versions Eastern and Ibo. But not before one reader, in his words, had ascertained that the manuscript was 'the nut without the kernel' for, beyond what was already known about the events in January, it disclosed little. I have spoken to three persons who read the manuscript.

same factor probably explains why Nzeogwu, who abominated Ojukwu, nevertheless had no option but to leave him in control of the Kana garrison.

Among the January coup-makers and coup-breakers-though not necessarily among all Ibo members of the Ironsi government – loyalties were not inherently tribal, but political and army-institutionalized. The young majors included in their planning group no officer above the rank of major, for fear that such colleagues, whether Ibo or even potentially sympathetic to their aims, would have been dangerous to the security of their plan and might have meant their surrender of control. For his part, General Ironsi's loyalties were to the regime he served. There is incontrovertible evidence<sup>31</sup> that some weeks before the coup, General Ironsi had wind of talk in the officers' mess that the army should act to end the crisis in the West. He reported this incident to the Federal prime minister's secretary and, at his suggestion, to the attorney-general. Ultimately the report reached the Minister of Defence and the prime minister himself. But the report was discounted, perhaps because too few details were known, and because the men in charge, General Ironsi among them, thought that a coup could not succeed in Nigeria.

The January coup was not an Ibo coup with motives of tribal domination. It was a coup inspired by widespread political grievances, yet lacking a direct organizational link with UP G A or any other political group. The coup grew out of the angry but confused political purposes of young officers, who shared the disgust of their generation at the iniquity of the politicians, not least their use of the army to further their purposes, but who, when they did decide to act, lacked the mass support that clearer political aims and preparation might have provided. The planning of the coup was defective both militarily and politically; the more so because of the need to bring the date forward so as to pre-empt the use of the army in the West.

More men and a longer period of preparation might have improved the logistics of the coup operation. It is doubtful if it would have made much difference to the post-coup politics of Nigeria. The soldiers would have released Awolowo and installed him as head of an interim government. 'I would have

stood by,' Nzeogwu said.<sup>32</sup> (He added that three-quarters of the police and more than half the judiciary would have been eliminated, because they had permitted themselves to be used for political purposes.) But the shape of an alternative Nigeria was nebulous to the young officers, and would in all probability have been left to Awolowo to decide. It was one thing to remove men who were pillars of a rotten political system, but quite another to get the system working any differently. On this, the young majors appear to have had little to offer, except a rather brutal vengeance against those whose moral and political purpose they had found so deficient. They planned their coup in a small, closed group of school and army course class-mates, never giving a thought to the charge that because five of the six inside planners were Ibo, this would be seen as evidence of an Ibo coup.

## **The Army Brass Takes Over**

Quite honestly, I don't feel like a governor, I still feel like a soldier. I would be much happier in the barracks with my men than in this Government House.

Lieutenant-Colonel Fajuyi, *West Africa*, 19 February 1966

The coup was greeted with more enthusiasm than independence itself had been six years before. 'Here in Ikenne and Shagamu you can feel the streets sighing with relief today,' wrote a school teacher. Nzeogwu and the young majors were heroes. In the West, the thuggery stopped almost overnight; the region veered from chaotic banditry to jubilant expectancy with astonishing speed. Within a fortnight, the police mobile contingent from the Northern provinces was withdrawn. Ministers vacated their official homes and returned their official cars. The politicians slunk out of sight; those who ventured into public places had to face open derision. The big men in the black cars excited not envy but contempt. Never was the venality of the old regime more despised than at the moment of its ignominious collapse. Nor was the mood of celebration confined to the South. The

North, too, experienced a week of exhilaration. The houses of Northern ministers were looted, by Northerners. While the Sardauna was alive, conducting government like a medieval court, holding all authority in the palm of his hand, and dispensing largesse or peremptory instruction, it seemed impossible to contemplate any other order. A strong North, it was believed, needed a strong Sardauna. But whether they were prepared to say so or not while he was alive, the younger civil servants and the younger levels of the NPC were restless under his tyrannical dominion, and they found welcome release when he had been removed. Those who had been the pillars of the old order were shocked and stunned into inactivity in the period immediately after the coup. But the ease with which the old order had been toppled was deceptive; and if NPC power, in the shape of Federal ministers and politicians, local big-wigs and their retainers, did not immediately react to the coup, this did not mean that there would be no reaction. It was a matter of time.

Nigerians were slow to grasp what had actually happened. The week-end had seen not a coup to break the old order, but a coup of reformers defeated in a holding action manned by the regular army command. Nigeria was in the hands of a military government; military governors had replaced the discredited political heads; but it was a military government that derived its legitimacy – and, minimal though this was, it was considerably greater than that of its successor would be – from a decision of the Cabinet to call in the army to restore order. In the general relief at the dislodging of corrupt politicians, army declarations of intent went unexamined. Nigeria watched Ironsi replace Nzeogwu, Nzeogwu bow out of Kaduna under military escort, and Nzeogwu disappear from the public eye, without realizing that this was the counter-action in progress. The political parties, the trade unions, the students, the Nigerian Youth Movement, traditional leaders like the Emir of Zaria, the Oni of Ife, the Alake of Abeokuta, the Sultan of Sokoto, all fell over one another to announce their enthusiasm for the new regime. The country was expecting radical changes to prevent the resurgence of the old order. But Major-General Ironsi and his four military

governors – Major Hassan Katsina in the North, Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu in the East, Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. Fajuyi in the West and Lieutenant-Colonel Ejoor in the Mid-West – were not reformers of the Egyptian Free Officer type. If Nzeogwu had been inspired by Nasser, Ironsi was more comparable with Neguib, who became head of a military government despite himself. In Nigeria, unlike Egypt, Neguib removed Nasser, not the other way about, and the reforming zeal of the young officers was snuffed out by the senior army command. The political representatives of the old order had gone, but the order itself was intact.

Nigeria's principal investors were not slow to record their confidence. 'Under Ironsi,' wrote a researcher for the Aero-Space Institute, in a US Air Force document, 'hope returned. There seemed to be a chance of finding a moderate middle of the road solution for problems of political administration in Nigeria.'<sup>33</sup> President Johnson told the United States Congress that despite the recent 'painful upheaval', Nigeria was one of the five countries which together accounted for nine-tenths of the \$665 million deployed in development loans. (The other four were Congo-Kinshasa, Ethiopia, Morocco and Tunisia: all countries that, in the view of the United States, were determined to help themselves.) On the same day as the US president's speech, the British High Commission sent personal letters to the heads of all British firms operating in Nigeria, assuring them that all was calm throughout the country, and that reports in the British press about the military take-over had 'exaggerated the seriousness of the situation'.<sup>34</sup> The major donor countries led by the World Bank increased their development aid to Nigeria, on the strength of a Six Year Development Plan which had one more year to run, but which was already far behind target and unlikely to catch up. Twice in its first week of office, the Supreme Military Council issued the assurance that there were no plans for nationalizing private industry, and that foreign investors would be 'fully free' to continue operating as they had done prior to the new government.<sup>35</sup> When probes were begun into the shady deals of the politicians, these did not touch the workings of expatriate firms. One of the first delegations that

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General Ironsi received was from the unions, to urge on them that no strikes be called while the military regime was in power. Strikes were 'wasteful rivalries', he said. All labour organizations should 'work as a team in the national interest'. One of the last statements of the Ironsi regime dealt with trade unions,<sup>36</sup> on the day that Ironsi himself was kidnapped by the July mutineers. The National Military government, it declared, was considering: (a) the introduction of compulsory arbitration and the establishment of industrial courts, to facilitate a speedy settlement of trade disputes which might otherwise result in strikes; (b) the banning of all existing labour unions, since these were a source of disunity in the country.

Into the power vacuum created by the toppling of the politicians stepped a new ruling group. This was the bureaucracy: the army and the civil service in close alliance, with the civil servants doing most of the thinking for the military. Hovering behind them were the academics. Ironsi made a tentative move to combine in government the forces of military men, civil servants and academics; the idea was debated for forty-eight hours non-stop, in the early stages of setting up a government machine. Some of the civil servants objected to the academics on the grounds that their inclusion would destroy the non-political character of the civil service. Ultimately two bodies emerged at the centre, the Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council, with the second performing the functions of the former Council of Ministers. Both were all-military in composition; General Ironsi was head of both. The individual ministries, however, were run by the permanent secretaries; and while there was a clean sweep of ministers and legislators, of political appointees to corporations and of elected councillors in the South, the civil service remained intact. Accordingly, for instance, the attorney-general's office was still headed by the man who had drafted the emergency regulations for the West and who was widely regarded as the hatchet of the old regime.\*

The theory was that a military government would operate

\*Some two months after the Ironsi government came to power, protest s resulted in his being dropped from office.

## *The Army Brass Takes Over*

without politics. Politics and politicians had been at the root of the evil old regime. The military cabinet, being non-political, needed no political heads, only technical and administrative experts. At long last the civil servants had obtained their release from the professional politicians, whose activities they had always regarded as an impediment to good government. The trouble was that the technocratic thinking of army men and civil servants alike led to an over-simplified notion of politics and the political process. It was assumed that the faults of the old regime had been due to the politicians, not to the political system; so that if, under the military regime, there were no politicians in government, the sources of political dissension would also have been removed.\*

Even as this antiseptic partnership of public servants, in uniform or out, went virtuously to work, however, 'politics' was growing underground, in the regions, within the army and the civil service, to thrust its way through the surface later. This was so especially in the North, where political power had been most firmly rooted in a more solidified social class. In the South, politicians were detained, some for longer periods than others. In the North, the old political class was at liberty, and the Native Authorities, the real source of NP C power, were intact; it was not long before the politicians were at work exploiting the apprehensions of Northern civil servants and students, and the frustrations of the unemployed.

Ironsi, a man of the old order, with the reflexes of the old regime and the pace of a staid senior administrator, filled his office with vagueness and procrastination. This was the failing of a military governor, but also of a government which had no clear purpose, made no statement of aims beyond immediate ones and, when it decided on a policy, acted by administrative fiat, without consultation or any attempt at mobilization in the country. Two main challenges faced the new regime: the ending

\*In May, eighty-one existing political parties were dissolved and the formation of new ones prohibited.

At one stroke, reported the *New Nigerian*, 8 July 1966, three ex-ministers of the Federal government and two former Northern ministers were made Ka.no Native Authority Councillors.

of the old regional divisions, with the building of national unity; and the eradication of corruption. General Ironsi and the four regional military governors issued declarations of policy in varying degrees of moderation or flamboyance. What pronouncements of reform were made were unexceptionable. But without clear proposals for the shape of the new political system, let alone any concept of long-term social and economic policy, the declarations amounted to little more than a vaguely stated commitment by soldiers and civil servants to honesty in public affairs, order and regularity in government. The Ironsi regime had no policy for reform when it began; and it had not found one by the time that it was brought down six months later.

In the absence of firm policy and direction from the government at the centre, the old regional interests began to reassert themselves; and the regional military governors, like chameleons, began to take on the colourings of the political system they had displaced. In the West, Fajuyi's broom swept cleanest, as the furniture of NNDP patronage and pressure was removed. More or less the same had happened when the Action Group split in 1962. But the old animosities were not deeply buried, if buried at all, in the region. In the North – by contrast with the West, the East and the Mid-West, where probes of the activities and interests of the politicians were initiated – the military governor was silent or defensive on the subject of corruption. The Northern Nigerian Marketing Board was investigated, but only strong pressure on the governor resulted in the report of the inquiry being published. The NPC and NNDP were drawing courage from the inaction and indecision of the regime and were waiting their opportunity to test their strength. Among young Southerners, there was a growing disillusionment with the regime. By the time that Ironsi's government was caught in the crossfire of the old regional conflicts, the forces of the old order had rallied; whereas the regime had knocked any possible support from underneath itself by demoralizing or antagonizing the reformers.

The touchstone of the conflict was the fate of the young majors. In the South, the Ironsi regime stood condemned for its failure to release Nzeogwu and his fellow coup-makers. In the North

and in the army, the regime was under constant pressure to court-martial the young majors for insubordination, perhaps treason. By July the minutes of the Supreme Military Council recorded that the young majors were to be court-martialled not later than October. The proceedings would be open to the public.<sup>37</sup>

Ironsi's instinct was all along to placate the Northerners. Thus, as his regime opened, he appointed Major Hassan Katsina, son of the emir of Katsina, as military governor of the North. This soothed the traditionalists temporarily. Similarly, Ironsi's open reliance on Northern officers in the army (he appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon chief-of-staff over Ogundipe, giving him virtual command of the army; placed young Northerners in charge of ordnance and signals; was guarded only by Northern soldiers) and the state visit to Lagos arranged for the Sultan of Sokoto were gestures of conciliation. But they did not resolve his government's mounting dilemma in the face of conflicting pressures. For fear of antagonizing the North, the regime did nothing to mobilize support for itself. The most obvious step was the release of Chief Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and their associates of the treason trial in the West. General Ironsi three times set a date for their release. The first date was in March; but Ironsi told Peter Enahoro of certain rumours that he himself had taken part in plotting the January revolt: 'To allay fears that the South had conspired against the North, he decided to defer.... Another date was fixed in May. At the discussions in State House, the Governor of the North said vehemently that Chief Awolowo's release at that time would cause furore in the North ... though Fajuyi pressed, as he had done for many months, that contrary to exciting rebellion in the North, Chief Awolowo's discharge would rally civilians to the banner of the military regime.'<sup>38</sup> The final release date was set for ■ August 1966. By that date Ironsi was dead.

Ironsi temporized in the same way over Tiv demands. He claimed to be impressed by their arguments for Middle Belt autonomy; but nothing happened. He received deputations from J. S. Tarka, the Tiv leader, on six different occasions; but then reports circulated that he was about to have Tarka arrested.

Government was already being run largely by rumour and

intrigue. Those who could not reach General Ironsi's ear through committee or formal proceeding, buttonholed him at drinking parties. The coup had done nothing to remove old antagonisms between the high-ups of the civil service; for the service, no less than the government of the politicians, had been a tug-of-war between contestants of different regions for office and promotion. Under the Balewa regime, Southerners argued, Northerners had been elevated to senior posts because they were Northerners, not necessarily because they were qualified; now, with its destruction, Northerners were apprehensive about their future. The bitter power struggle that had been going on for years between Ibos and Yorubas in the federal service, where Yorubas had entrenched their monopoly as the first arrivals and earliest qualified, was now given a sharper bite. It was an open secret in Lagos that old rivalries among the country's top civil servants who had enjoyed different sources of patronage under the old regime, far from being forgotten, had flared again. Ironsi, an Ibo, it was said, was going out of his way to further Ibo power: did he not depend on an inner clique of Ibo advisers, whose instrument he was? and when key appointments were made, as of the new attorney-general and several heads of crucial commissions, were they not Ibo?

It was the report on the future of the civil service from one of these commissions that precipitated the crisis. The study groups\* set up by the regime were the long-awaited preliminaries to reform. A number had been appointed: one to deal with the constitutional review; one to function as an economic planning advisory group; one to report on different policy aspects. Mr

\*National Study Groups were set up by edict on 28 February 1966. The first group of seven members was to consider a number of related subjects in the context of national unity: Mr Justice S. P. J. O. Thomas (judicial services), U.M.D. (statutory), F. C. Nwokidi (public services), J. I. Ilson (mormauon servlces), usu u o lr (police and prisons), O. Bateye (administrative machinery). The second group of nine members was to deal with the constitutional review and was composed of Dr T. O. Elias, Chief Rotimi Williams, Dr Essien Udom, Dr Okoi Arikpo, Alhaji M. Buba Ado and four administrative officers. The third group of nine members composed the National Planning Advisory Group and included Chief S. Adebo, Dr Pius Akigbo, Mr Godfrey Lardner, Professor F. A. Oluwasanmi and Dr I. Abubakar.

## *The Army Brass Takes Over*

Francis Nwokedi, former permanent secretary for external affairs and one of the most senior Ibo federal civil servants, was to make proposals for the public services, 'in the context of national unity'. The outcome of his inquiry was Decree 34 and, accompanying it, an announcement by General Ironsi that Nigeria had ceased to be a federation, that the regions were abolished and that the public services were to be unified. Decree 34 was promulgated on 24 May. Five days later there were fierce mob killings of Ibos in Northern towns. The North struck against its loss of power at the centre and at what it believed to be the real purpose of the Ironsi regime, the abandonment of the federal constitution in order to consolidate Nigeria under Ibo domination. After the May killings there came, at intervals of two months each, the revenge coup of Northerners in the army, which brought down the Ironsi regime and installed the Gowon government; and the September-October massacre of Ibos in the North, after which the word *pogrom* became part of the Nigerian vocabulary.

The Nwokedi recommendations were in reality not as climacteric as the furore surrounding them. They changed less in fact than in Northern fear. The regions were to be known as groups of provinces, and the governors were to be heads not of regions but of provinces; but they were to govern under the same arrangements as previously. The public services were to be unified under a single public service commission; but provincial commissions were to make all appointments to the unified service except for the top-ranking posts (group 6 and above in the civil service list, which meant salaries of £2,200 a year and over). It meant that the provincial services would have more patronage to dispense than the regional ones had had previously, when all federal posts from the highest to the lowest had been dealt with by the Federal public service commission. But top Northern civil servants stood to lose from the fact that seniority in the federal service was to be calculated on salary; for civil service salary grades were lower in the North than elsewhere. Above all, the North was fearful at the sight of power at the centre in the hands of Ironsi and a close group of civil servants from the East.

It was, of course, stupid and provocative to appoint civil servants to tackle on their own the most taxing problems facing the country, before the regime had formulated an overall policy of reform and the main outlines of a new political structure. Only when these principles had been decided, could civil servants constructively be asked to pad out these proposals. If provinces were to displace regions, and a unitary state a federal one, what would the functions and powers of the provinces be? What political and administrative structure was to be devised for the unitary state? How would the system of revenue allocation operate? Such questions were left wide open. Civil servants had been instructed to search for unification formulae as though this was a purely technical exercise.

General Ironsi's announcement of the decree<sup>39</sup> was a measure of his regime's confusion. The new arrangements for the civil service, he said, were 'without prejudice' to the commission still at work on the new constitution. But if the overall lines of the new constitution had still to be considered, why the unseemly haste to push through the Nwokedi recommendations? One of the most influential of the Federal permanent secretaries complained that he had first heard of the decree on the radio as he came off the tennis court. There had been two months of argument for and against a unified public service; suddenly it was law. The Supreme Military Council had been divided, with most of its members opposed. At the meeting immediately before the decree was promulgated, Ironsi heard the governors out after they had lodged their objections in writing, and then said, 'I'm committed.' Colonel Katsina flew from the meeting of the Council to announce at Kaduna airport, 'Tell the nation that the egg will be broken on Tuesday. Two important announcements will be made by the Supreme Commander.' These, he added with characteristic accommodation, would be for the betterment of the nation as a whole and 'a very good thing'.\*

\*Lieutenant-Colonel Fajuyi had written a five-page memorandum setting out the difficulties and problems that he envisaged. He added a concluding paragraph stating that if these objections were taken into account he agreed with the tenor of the document. The governor of the North telephoned Fajuyi. 'Why the last paragraph?' he asked. 'Out of courtesy,' was Fajuyi's reply.

In all, sixty-four of the country's most senior civil servants – seventeen of them expatriates – were directly affected by Decree 34. But the civil service is the main outlet in all regions for Nigeria's too rapidly growing educated elite, and young Northerners, fearing displacement in open competition within a national bureaucracy, felt themselves directly in the line of fire. Significantly, the incident that set off the killings in the North was a demonstration, in Zaria's old city, of students from the Institute of Public Administration. They carried provocative placards: 'Avenge the Sardauna's death' and 'Northern unity'. Decree 34 was precipitate; and the unification announcement that accompanied it, ill-considered and ambiguous. But neither the decree nor the speech was judged by what it said or meant, except, perhaps, by those who were immediately affected. Decree 34 was not the cause of the trouble but the occasion for it. It was announced in an atmosphere polluted by propaganda that behind every policy emanating from the Ironsi regime lay an Ibo plan for domination. The first step in the Ibo plan to colonize the North would be the Ibo take-over of the civil service; and the word spread that Ibos were about to migrate northwards in droves to take over all competitive posts. In the North, where Ibo immigrants had always been resented as alien, incitement by a small group of plotters flared only too fiercely into a mob violence that, once provoked, was self-generating. The cry of the killings was '*Araba*' (Let us part). Northern secession was the watchword. Ibos in the North were attacked as the embodiment of the Ibo-run government in Lagos. In Zaria the rioters began to identify themselves as 'the army of the North', ready to repulse so-called Ibo attacks; for rumour had been assiduously spread that Ibos were preparing to retaliate. This had the calculated effect of setting off fresh violence. The May killings showed that the old order in the North was ready to fight back. And by then it was also clear that the Ironsi regime had thrown together in the North forces previously incompatible, even hostile, to one another. Northerners, whether NPC or NEPU, Hausa-Fulani ruling class or Middle Belt, closed ranks in the belief that, if Northern power had been broken at the centre, the

alternative was an Ibo domination that threatened all Northerners.

The May killings were barely reported in Nigeria. The *New Nigerian* of 30 May 1966 appeared with four of its eight pages blank and the announcement: 'Within fifteen minutes of this edition . . . going to press a telephone message was received from a government official instructing that no reference be made to the subject that formed the basis of the reports and pictures which should have occupied this space. . . .'

The month after the killings was spent in trying to pick up the pieces. Ibos who had fled to the East were persuaded, by Ojukwu himself, to return under promise of protection. Northern emirs and chiefs met in conference with the Northern military governor, to hear him discourage all acts of lawlessness and to insist at the same time that there be no permanent changes in the constitution without consultation. From that meeting a memorandum listing the demands of chiefs and emirs, and threatening secession if they were not accepted, went to Lagos. The contents of the memorandum were never disclosed, but the reply of the Supreme Military Council incensed the North. 'The Military Government is not an elected government, and should not be treated as such,' it said. 'It is a corrective government, designed to remove the abuses of the old regime and create a healthy community for return to civilian rule.'<sup>40</sup> The constitutional review group, the statement added, was still weighing the merits and demerits of a unitary or federal form of government; but 'while in office, the military government can run the government only as a military government under a unified command. It cannot afford to run five separate governments and separate services as if a civilian regime.' Less than a week later, in an address at police headquarters, Ironsi announced a scheme for the rotation of military governors, and for the creation of military prefectures – responsible for carrying government policy to village level – which, like the governors, would be rotated from one group of provinces to another. The military government had begun to take more power to itself.

But the May killings had shown that General Ironsi could not lean on his army to control disorder, let alone to unify the

country.\* Anti-Ibo and anti-Ironsi feeling had been fermenting inside the army as inside the regions. Of 4 Battalion, it has been said that<sup>41</sup> 'the barracks were trembling' during the January coup, and men in the ranks wept at the deaths of their Northern commanding officers. Suspicion and antagonism probably mounted more slowly and unevenly than this, for 4 Battalion reaction does not seem to have been general throughout the army so soon. There is evidence that the army basked in the general acclaim at having been instrumental in bringing down the old regime. But by May there was explosive junior officer and other rank (overwhelmingly Northern) hostility against an officer corps more than ever dominated by Ibo officers, since the elimination of the most senior Northern officers in January, and after a batch of promotions almost all Ibo, especially at the rank of lieutenant-colonel, by the Ironsi regime.

## **The Revenge Coup**

The July coup was not war between North and South, but a misunderstanding between members of the armed forces.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hassan Katsina

In July the army turned to slaughter the Ibos within it, as the North staged its counter-coup. Plotting had been going on for months. The NPC and, in the West, the NNDP had been at work subverting the army. Former Minister of Defence and NPC treasurer, Unuwa Wada, was ideally placed to do this. He had close contacts with Northern officers, having been responsible for the promotion of many of them; he was related to the most aggressive of the Northern army hawks, Colonel Mohammed Murtala, who was the NPC's instrument among the military; and he had at his disposal large funds, from both the NPC treasury and his personal fortune, with which to buy influence. The process of subversion could be seen at work

\*In Zaria where some eighty people were killed at the end of May the army barracks adjoin the *sabon gari*, but no soldier was mobilized to help the victims, Dr James O'Connell points out in his article in *Race*, p. 99 f.n.

among the young lieutenants and captains sent on a training course in Kaduna from April till early July. Politicians and their contact men made a dead set at these twenty-five young officers, drawn from all five battalions and some training units; indeed, after the May killings, little trouble was taken to conceal the fact that the leading disaffected Northern officers were making a concerted bid to contact their counterparts in other units at Kaduna, and that a plot was in preparation. A rumour circulated during the course that the Ibos had been given live rounds of ammunition (by an Ibo officer, of course), while all others had received only blanks. But specific acts of provocation apart, the general talk was of imminent bloodshed to avenge the officers killed in January. Several men on this course subsequently figured among those who played a prominent part in the July coup.<sup>4 2</sup>

Cover plan for the Northern mutiny of 29 July 1966 was the spreading of the alarm that the Ibos themselves were preparing a second coup; in August, some said. One version claimed that this was 'to finish off the North'; others believed that young radicals were to remove Ironsi by force because he was not carrying through tougher policies. Ibos were among those who believed and spread the rumours. But no hard evidence of any such planning has been produced; and it is difficult to see why Ibos, already accused of being too firmly in control, would need to take such drastic actions; or, if Ironsi was to be the target because he was too conservative, what forces were being mustered to remove him. Rumour of the so-called Ibo coup that would 'finish off' Northern officers added urgency to the planning and incentive to the by now fiercely embittered groups of Northerners, especially in 4 Battalion and 2 Battalion, which Mohammed Murtala commanded at Ikeja and from where he was to seize the airport.<sup>43</sup>

General Ironsi's visit to Ibadan – up to now his only journeys outside Lagos had been to the North – became the occasion for a several times delayed assassination plan. (During a visit to Kano, only the intervention of the Emir had prevented it.) Intelligence sources had wind of the plan forty-eight hours before; but either Ironsi discounted their reports, or they did

not reach him. In the event, the first shots fired in the revenge coup were aimed not at the head of state, but at three Ibo officers in the mess of the Abeokuta barracks. The gun battle in the mess grew swiftly into a manhunt through the barracks by armed Northerners for Ibo officers and men to kill. From Abeokuta the news of the killings was transmitted to 4 Battalion at Ibadan and to 2 Battalion at Ikeja which, under Colonel Mohammed Murtala, seized Ikeja airport. By midnight General Ironsi's bodyguard had been removed and disarmed. Northerners among them were reinforced by a special contingent of Northerners from 4 Battalion under the command of Major T. Y. Danjuma-who, with Colonel Mohammed Murtala, was one of the two prime organizers – which placed Government House under siege. But it was not until the following morning that Major Danjuma confronted the Supreme Commander, ordered his arrest, and had him led into the police vehicles waiting outside.

It looked very much as though the North's counter-coup went off at half-cock before it was quite ready. The operation was a combination of conspiracy and spreading combustion. Like January, it did not synchronize in all centres: the kidnap party arrived at State House, where Ironsi was staying with Fajuyi, to take away the general only some hours after the mutiny flared at Abeokuta; and the killings of Ibo officers began in the North only some twenty-four hours after the Abeokuta attack. In the Mid-West and in the East, the plan aborted, as in January. At Enugu reports on trouble in Abeokuta were received in time for the governor to order action to forestall it. On the other hand, the killings revealed not only a fanatical fury, but high ingenuity and some considerable organization, too: as in the use of army signals for the ambush of Ibos ostensibly being ordered to special duties.

Legend has grown round the last hours of Ironsi, and of Fajuyi,<sup>44</sup> who is said to have murmured 'John, it's not our day', and to have insisted that if the soldiers were removing the Supreme Commander, they should take him, too. Ironsi's air force aide-de-camp was witness, as co-prisoner, to the kidnap; but he managed to escape from the spot ten miles from Ibadan

where Ironsi and Fajuyi, after being stripped and flogged, were finished off with a few rounds of machine-gun fire.<sup>45</sup> In the evening of the same day, Northern soldiers returned to the spot and covered the two bodies with earth scraped from the ground around them. As the killings spread, they followed a pattern. Soldiers of Southern origin were disarmed; the armoury and magazines were seized by Northern troops, and an alarm sounded: when Easterners responded along with others, they were arrested, thrown into the guard-room or some other place of captivity, and shot, often after torture. The Eastern version of the July coup is the only one available. The Federal government ordered no investigation into the events. A guarded government spokesman at State House in Lagos told me, in an unexpected burst of candour, 'Some of the people involved may be at the helm today.'

The Eastern version contains lurid descriptions of terrible killings. In some instances, eye witnesses appear to have survived and escaped to the East; several of the accounts appear to be based on their experiences. The version is replete with names and details of time, place and particular incident. It must be read for a sense of the horror and fury and fear that rose in the East after the July coup. In the rest of the Federation, the press reported virtually nothing of the July events. On one day before the week-end, Nigeria knew Ironsi as head of government; one day after the week-end, Gowon had taken his place. What happened over that week-end itself, inside the army, in the frantic, shifting cliques of king-slayers and king-makers, is barely known.

In the absence of other accounts, it is impossible to test conclusively the accuracy of the Eastern version. Some descriptions are convincing enough: as, for instance, the account of how Ibo officers at Ibadan were locked into the tailor's workshop and then systematically wiped out with hand grenades and rifle and machine-gun fire; twenty-four corpses were buried in a mass grave that night. There is also an account of the spot near the intersection of the Jos and Kaduna roads which was turned into an execution ground. There are details of such cryptic instructions to kill Ibos as: 'Send him to the Eastern House of Chiefs.'

Where the report does strain, though, is in its determined identification of every single Northern officer with the plot; even, in the case of General Gowan and Lieutenant-Colonel Akahan, where there is evidence that they themselves were pushed into action under duress by their men and Ncos,<sup>46</sup> or when links between them and events were tenuous in the extreme. The compelling feature of the July mutiny, indeed, was the initiative taken by NCOs, and the pressure put by them on their officers. This is not to discount the role played by Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Murtala and Major Danjuma; or the existence of an inner group that deliberately incited and planned the killings. But once the killing had begun, the Ncos and other ranks took over; and if authority rested anywhere, it was at the rank of young Northern lieutenants.

Within three days of the July outbreak, every Ibo serving in the army outside the East was dead, imprisoned or fleeing eastward for his life. The death toll is thought to have been in the neighbourhood of 300.\* Army clerks and technicians of Eastern origin were kept at their duties under duress; but with the army officers who fled to save their lives, went a number of civil servants and ordinary people. For, as the news of the killings in the army leaked out, there was no knowing if the violence would stop there. Chinua Achebe left his radio job in Lagos at this time, hours before armed soldiers called to fetch him from his house.

For the best part of August, it was touch and go whether the army, or Nigeria, would hold together at all. For four days there was not even a nominal government, as two forces in the army struggled for control. July was the North's revenge coup; but the North consisted not only of the old NPC Hausa-Fulani power bloc, represented in the army by Colonel Mohammed Murtala, but also of the Middle Belt, which commanded 80 per cent of the army's rifle power. The two forces in the North had coalesced to mount the revenge coup, but they diverged immediately it was successful. Akahan for the Middle Belt elements in

\*The Eastern account lists forty-three officers and 171 other ranks killed. The evidence for the incidents at Ibadan and Ikeja barracks was kept in the military archives at Umuahia, Biafra.

the army and Mohammed Murtala for the old North jostled for control. It was out of this contest that Gowan emerged on top.

By army practice, Brigadier Ogundipe, a Westerner, should have succeeded to the command after Ironsi's removal. He spent a nightmare week-end trying to take command. When he heard the news of the mutiny, he set up an operations room from where he tried to reimpose discipline. The telephone conversations he had with Colonel Akahan, commander of the Ibadan battalion, convinced him that Akahan was not his own master, but that there was a gun, or some other pressure, behind him. Ogundipe ordered all soldiers to remain in barracks, but forces of mutineers had already moved off to set up road blocks on the airport-Lagos road. He decided to clear the airport of the mutineers, but he could muster only a scratch force of non-combatant troops and one headquarters unit, which was ambushed along the road by the mutineers and retreated in disorder. A column managed to reach the Ikeja barracks, but the troops, largely Northerners, refused to take orders from their officer, a Mid-Westerner. This, the brigadier told himself, was no longer an army. From the airport, a spokesman of the mutineers telephoned the brigadier. They had decided to go North, they said, and had detained a VC-ro at the airport to carry their families home.

'You take over command,' they said. 'We want to go.'

'I'm a soldier, not an administrator, you obey my orders.'

'What orders?'

'Back to the barracks. Return your arms to the armoury. Then we'll talk.'

'No,' they said.

Around Ogundipe, in nominal but transparently ineffectual command, there fluttered that week-end a series of consultations in Lagos sitting-rooms. The Chief Justice, the former attorney-general, a former Minister of Education, and the secretary of Lagos' Institute of International Affairs discussed how to fill what they called 'the political vacuum in the country'. The peace-makers, as they saw themselves, were in touch with Ogundipe, and he with Admiral Weyand the military governors, so that there was a network through which, for instance, the Northern governor's adviser could be reached. Up and down

this line went proposals for a new army head and the countering of the secession cry raised by the Northern army mutineers. For by then it was plain that the seizure of the VC-ro was not an isolated step; that the cry of the July coup was 'Araba', and that the Northerners were preparing to pull out. If Ogundipe was acceptable at all as Ironsi's successor, it would be to preside over the division of the country's assets, the 'peace-makers' argued among themselves in Lagos. But the army would not have Ogundipe; and Ogunclipe, after eighteen years, decided that he would no longer have the army. The one constructive course that could be followed by this group, therefore, was to get Ogundipe out of the way. He was convinced that he was to be the mutiny's next victim. He left his headquarters, his pistol at the ready, as troops were taking up position. The problem of where to find him a new posting was knotty. 'We don't have any colonies', mused one of the group wittily. In time he emerged in London as Nigeria's High Commissioner.

The core of the crisis was being probed not in these rather peripheral areas but inside the Ikeja barracks. Most of the day on which the mutiny broke out, Ogundipe had been waiting for Gowon, his chief-of-staff, to join him in his operations room; but nothing had been seen of Gowon since his arrival at Ikeja barracks, where he had gone to have a look at the trouble. There 2 Battalion's other ranks had taken over and ordered their officers aside as they went about their business of killing Ibos. Gowon had been placed under guard on Colonel Mohammed Murtala's orders; but as the coup got under way, he graduated from hostage to nominee of the Ncos as commander-in-chief. Murtala might have been the evil genius behind the coup; but it was executed by the NCOs, largely Middle-Belters; and it was Gowon, not Murtala, who had their confidence and who emerged to speak for them. Ogundipe's last contact with Gowon was on the telephone. Just before leaving his headquarters, he rang Gowon to say: 'Jack, I'm fed up. There was a gentlemen's agreement there would be no shooting [referring to his telephone attempts to persuade the Ikeja mutineers to return their arms to the armoury].' And Gowon answered, 'Well, sir, if you hear the reason, they were justified.'

Before he left the scene altogether, Ogundipe referred an anxious group of permanent secretaries to 2 Battalion barracks. 'Talk to the boys Iatkeja,' he said; 'they're in control.' When a group of them arrived at the barracks, they were stopped by the soldiers on guard who called to their escort, 'What tribe?' The answer came, 'Civil servants'. 'That's okay. They can come in.'<sup>47</sup> The Northern coup-makers were set on secession. Through the mutiny, they had achieved their act of revenge; this done, the North would go it alone. The mutiny had no sooner broken out, indeed, than large numbers of Northern civil servants quit Lagos for home; and the exodus was not stemmed for several days. But a compact group of permanent secretaries, which was to emerge after the Gowan take-over as the strongest pulse of that government, set desperately to work at trying to stop the Northern secession movement. They were joined by a group of influential young Northern civil servants, who were in constant telephone communication with the Ikeja mutineers, urging them, 'For heaven's sake, don't leave, stay there.' If there was to be any withdrawal, went one argument, 'it had to be done on a systematic and agreed basis'; and the time was not yet come. Northern secession, went another argument used in Lagos, would mean 'Our money will fly away. Foreign bankers will lose all confidence.' It was the pressures of British and, above all, United States diplomats that drove this latter argument forcibly home, for the influence of the two powers converged decisively on the permanent secretaries and thus on Ikeja during these shaky days. Mohammed Murtala remained adamant for secession; but Gowan represented the group of Middle-Belters who saw in Northern secession the danger that they would be a perpetual and vulnerable minority in the North. Thus it was that Yakubu Gowan- thirty-four years old, and a member of the tiny Angas tribe of the Middle-Belt plateau – emerged as the North's compromise candidate for head of government, to be later confirmed as Supreme Commander by majority decision of those in the Supreme Military Council who still survived.

The conflict between the two wings of the army, and the hair-breadth victory of the anti-secessionists, comes out starkly in the broadcast address delivered by Gowan on ■ August to

announce his assumption of command. 'I have now come to the most difficult but most important part of this statement. I am doing it conscious of the great disappointment and heart-break it will cause all true and sincere lovers of Nigeria and of the Nigerian unity, both at home and abroad, especially our brothers in the Commonwealth,' he said. The basis for unity was not there. It had been badly rocked not once but several times. 'We cannot honestly and sincerely continue in this wise as the basis for unity and confidence in our unitary system has been (unable) to stand the test of time.'<sup>48</sup> (The official *version* in *Nigeria 1966* inexplicably, for the sense of this sentence, leaves out the negative.) Then followed an undertaking to 'review the issue of our national standing', but no announcement of secession. Clearly there had been a secession announcement in the original draft of the statement; it had been cut at the last minute, and whoever had tried to rejoin the remaining pieces had left the stitches showing. It had all, in fact, been done at inordinate speed. Last-minute British High Commission arguments persuaded Gowan to excise the critical paragraph.

The threat of Northern secession, so narrowly averted, showed through even more seriously inside the Supreme Military Council. Ojukwu announced over the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting service<sup>40</sup> that the only conditions on which the 'rebels' (the July mutineers) would agree to a cease-fire were: (1) that the Republic of Nigeria be split into its component parts; and (2) that all Southerners in the North be repatriated to the South, and all Northerners resident in the South be repatriated to the North. This, he said, had emerged in discussions with Brigadier Ogundipe and the other military governors, and with Lieutenant-Colonel Gowan as army chief-of-staff. Although, continued the Ojukwu broadcast, the only representations made at these 'cease-fire negotiations' were those of the rebels and their supporters in the North, and notwithstanding that the views of the people in the Eastern provinces had not been ascertained, it was agreed to accept these proposals to stop further bloodshed. Ojukwu announced that he would shortly call a meeting of all chiefs and organizations in the Eastern provinces to advise him on the future of Nigeria. In the meanwhile, chiefs and leaders

should stop any retaliation, 'in the hope that this was the final act of sacrifice of Easterners'.

Ojukwu's statement appeared in the Lagos press on two successive days; on the second, the same paper also carried a short report of an interview with Colonel Hassan Katsina: 'At no time did the government consider the repatriation of people from one part of the country to another.' In the same issue there was a statement by Lieutenant-Colonel Gowan, whose attention had been drawn to the Ojukwu broadcast, that the 'National Military Government was not aware of any arrangement or agreement in the terms outlined in the statement'.<sup>o</sup> Both the Ojukwu-Ogundipe-military governors' exchanges along the army communications network and the Northern secession move had been overtaken by events in which the Eastern military governor had no part. He was going by the last official contact he had had with what was to him the last recognizable army authority. But in the meanwhile authority in both army and government had changed hands. Easterners, decimated in the army officer corps, and for all practical purposes dislodged from the Supreme Military Council because it was considered unsafe for the Eastern governor to leave the East for Council meetings, found no way to reconcile the Eastern region to this change.

In the first week after the July coup, Nigeria seemed to hang by a thread. It was a small group of Federal civil servants (most of them, significantly, Mid-Westerners or Middle-Belters, and thus from the least viable of the states or from the areas agitating for separation), stiffened by the regular if not always formal exchanges with British and United States diplomats, that knitted together new strands of support for the Gowan regime. Two days after his assumption of power, Gowan released Chief Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and other jailed Action Groupers. Indeed, Gowan went personally to the airport to tell Awolowo that his wealth of experience would be needed. It had taken a Northern coup to release Awolowo; now, in one move, the Gowan regime propped itself up in the West and drove the first wedge between any potential alliance of the Action Group radicals and their counterparts across the Niger in the East. Two weeks later, Gowan amnestied 1,035 Tiv who had been

imprisoned for their part in the rioting in Tiv Division between 1960-64. 'So we are really free,' remarked *one* as he was released. 'God bless the National Military Government.'<sup>51</sup>

'There will be a return to civilian rule very soon,' said General Gowon, 'and I mean it. Very soon is very soon.'<sup>52</sup> In the regions, 'Leaders of Thought' meetings were held to prepare the way for a constitutional conference. In Kaduna, Leaders of Thought, picked by the governor and his advisers, walked hand in hand into the hall where they were to deliberate. Political labels were anathema, but most of the old figures were there. The lawyers with degrees and the lawyers with guns instead set to work. Federalism or confederalism? Which powers to the centre? What constitutional formula? The old faith in the constitution reasserted itself: with the right constitution, all else would fall neatly into place.

The army, however, was still in turmoil. The killings had not ended with the emergence of a new military commander and head of state. Colonel Mohammed Murtala was pressing for a march on Enugu. Armed groups of soldiers were taking gun law into their own hands and committing new acts of vengeance. Army headquarters played events down by denying them. 'All Army Officers are Safe in the North', read a government press release.<sup>53</sup> Persistent rumours that a number of army officers in the North had been taken away to an unknown destination or had been killed had been personally investigated by the Supreme Commander and found to be false.<sup>54</sup> On 9 August the decision was taken to divide up the army and repatriate troops to their regions of origin. On the telephone Gowon told Ojukwu: 'Honestly my consideration is to save the lives of these boys (Easterners), and the only way to do it is to remove the troops back to barracks in their region of origin.' In the West, this was to mean virtually a Northern army of occupation; for there were few Yorubas in the army, and those were mostly tradesmen.<sup>55</sup> But for all the apprehensions of Westerners, the army was not looking in their direction; it was still going about the unfinished business of the July revenge coup. On 12 August, there was the mass round-up of Eastern NCOs in the Apapa units. On 9 August, Northern soldiers from Ibadan converged on Benin prison and

seized Eastern detainees—among them one of the January majors, Okafor — to beat and torture five of them to death. (Okafor was buried alive.)<sup>56</sup> Among Ibos the fear grew that Northerners were intent on a final solution. Who, after May and what was to happen in September, could say that their fears were unfounded? Throughout August there was a panic exodus of Ibos eastwards. Many took their families home and then returned; but shuttered houses in the *sabon garis* of the North and a stream of applications for leave from work bore testimony to a flight which was reckoned to have involved half a million by mid-August.<sup>57</sup> The Federal government treated it as a disciplinary problem. Throughout August and September, Enugu radio broadcast reports of how soldiers were interfering with convoys of returning Easterners.\* Government officials in Kaduna described the allegations as false, but said that all Native Authorities had been instructed to prevent such occurrences. The incidents of July were confined to the army, insisted the Federal government,<sup>58</sup> and it was mere rumour-mongering that was causing civilian panic. In Lagos and Kaduna, police, in combined operations with soldiers, recovered official army uniforms on sale in the open market.<sup>59</sup> Ojukwu in the East called for a day of mourning; Gowon in Lagos said that the call was unconstitutional and unhelpful to attempts at keeping the country together.

Already it was as though there were two Nigerias: in the one, bitterness and rising panic; in the other, a dogged refusal to admit that anything untoward had happened, and a dogged search for constitutional forms. The national conference to discuss Nigeria's future form of government opened on 12 September. Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon ruled out both a unitary form and a complete break-up of the country. The conference was to consider four possibilities: (1) a federal system with a strong central government; (2) a federal system with a weak federal

\* About sixty trucks bringing home refugees were held up about six miles from Lafia in Northern Nigeria. All male passengers were being asked to pay a tax of £2 8s. The operation was carried out by a combined team of Native Administration and Nigerian police in the North. (ME/2245, 19 August.) There was organized gangsterism against Easterners at Makurdi where trains were held up by armed soldiers and the men ordered out. At Otuokpo the food of the travellers was seized. (ME/2248, 25 August.)

government; (3) a confederation; or (4) an entirely new arrangement perhaps peculiar to Nigeria and which had not yet found its way into any political dictionary.

Civilian figures [writes Martin Dent] were being asked to do too much, to produce an all-embracing blueprint for the furore Government of Nigeria, at a time when the crying need was for some immediate reconciliation between North and East, for some working agreement on the question of secession, to produce acceptance of the head of Government throughout Nigeria, and for some way to assuage the grief and anger of the Ibos for their loss in May and in July. The 120-page document of the proposals for the final constitutional conference reads a little sadly – a collection of PhD theses on an ideal constitution at a time when the chance of any of the recommendations being implemented was slight indeed.<sup>60</sup>

## Constitutions and Killings

I have looked around the country to find just one person who is human, to whom I can speak or write, and who would not betray me. I can hardly find any for fear that humans are no longer human – you can never say what happens next – they turn round against you.

For six months I can hardly sleep, eat, no rest, can't sleep an inch from my room, have lost my parents, brothers and deprived of my wife and property, my good friends have either been killed or kidnapped....

... I agree we and I are a cursed tribe, we are infidels and criminals, we are traitors, we are braggarts and everything. I agree entirely. **If** you dare enter public transport, in the offices and elsewhere, and hear how we are being talked about, your ears will bleed to death. They ask what we bastards are still doing here- can't we go home? ... I want to tell you categorically that I am an Ibo man, a Nigerian, opposed to secession because I cannot afford to lose my many good friends all over the country. **If** I had wanted to go back to the East I could have done that long ago, but I bluntly refused to go in spite of persistent persuasion and force by my people. The Federal Government promised us protection of life and property. Every Ibo man is so frightened to go to the North, Lagos is worse than a concentration camp, we are beaten daily and killed. To go home *is* a problem because the fight has been

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carried even to our homes. Where else do we go? Back to God? I have seen Ibos mercilessly beaten up and killed. I have seen soldiers go from room to room collecting every known Ibo and dumping into the landrover. I have seen Yorubas beaten up for not disclosing Ibos. I have seen a Rausa man, a big man for that matter, being tortured for refusing to surrender an Ibo friend. I have myself been tortured in a public place but lucky to escape death, to my greatest surprise my Yoruba friends around and others started to weep, knelt down, begging me to forget and leave everything to God. Why is all this happening? simply because we are Ibo, just that name alone.

Every Iboman is regarded as a security risk.

. . . The other day a Yoruba friend of mine ran frantic to me, after seeing for the first time what it looks like torturing an Iboman (a Nigerian) by a soldier (a fellow Nigerian) and said 'When they come to you don't admit you are Ibo. I have seen some mid-Westerners do the same. And please put on a Yoruba gown.' I looked at him and sobbed. Though I am of Ibo parentage my foot has never stepped in the East.

Letter from an Ibo in Lagos

9 September 1967, sent to Tai Solarin

At the constitutional conference that opened at Lagos in September, the memoranda of the delegations dilated on the powers to be enjoyed by the head of state: cabinet procedure; banking; common services; copyrights, patents, trade marks; weights and measures; the borrowing of money inside and outside Nigeria; for all the world as though it were a British-style Marlborough House constitutional conference, and a new state was about to be born. On the matter of new states, the East said nothing initially; the Mid-West wanted twelve states in a tight federation; the official Western delegation advocated eight instead of the existing four states, and Awolowo, speaking for himself, advocated his own pet scheme of eighteen states; and the North wanted a confederation of four autonomous states, each with its own army and police force, civil service and judiciary, but sharing common services through an organization centred in the capital.<sup>61</sup> After several days of proceedings, there was an adjournment moved by the Mid-West for delegations to consult with their regional governments. When the conference

reopened four days later, the North had somersaulted on the issue of states. It now definitely favoured the retention of the Federation and the creation of new states, even to the extent of splitting the North itself. When the state scheme subsequently became part of the war effort against Biafra, Northern spokesmen represented their *volte-face* as a far-sighted compromise for the sake of Nigerian unity. A compromise it was, but not out of statesmanship. On the day that the conference adjourned, Tiv rifle power, that had wrenched the July coup from the old Northern power groups, nudged the constitutional conference into line. A Tiv petition, rough and ready, but with a map attached to it that divided the North into four states, and signed by two Middle-Belt politicians, reached the Mid-West delegation. The Tiv petition move had actually started outside the conference hall, among Middle-Belters of the Federal Guard in the Lagos barracks; it was their suggestions for their own Middle-Belt state that the two politicians had collated.

Over the week-end when the conference was adjourned, the Northern delegation had been in crisis. Once again there had been a showdown between the two forces in the North: with Tiv pressure insisting, change your policy, and the 'old' North capitulating. Once the petition was in the hands of the Mid-West delegation, there was forged a combination of minorities from two states, one official, the other emergent. And this combination became formidable with the backing of the Middle-Belters in the army, who could account for well over half the riflemen as well as a large proportion of Northern officers and NCOs. It was thus the army once again that shifted the centre of power inside the Federal government, where a knot of minority permanent secretaries that had emerged from the July coup already dominated the key ministries.

It followed that if, in the interests of the new states, the inviolable North were to be divided, the same had to be done to the East. During the conference, indeed, a petition had been lodged for a Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers state.<sup>62</sup> By the time that the proceedings resumed, the East was faced with a *fait accompli*. The East argued that, to save the country before it was too late, immediate constitutional arrangements for Nigeria as a whole

should be made on the basis of the existing regions, and new political arrangements to suit minority problems should best be settled within the regions themselves.<sup>63</sup> The Eastern delegates, protesting that they were not plenipotentiaries but delegates, and that they had to consult their region, talked to an unresponsive conference. All the other delegations pressed for an immediate public release of conference decisions. The talking was not yet over when the fury broke, or was unleashed.

The Ibos in the North of Nigeria, it has been shown<sup>64</sup> – like the Jews, the Armenians, the Dahomeyans in the Ivory Coast and Niger, and other minority groups at other times in history – were ready targets for a pogrom. For decades they had spread out through Nigeria: as wage labourers, lower-level administrators, railwaymen, policemen, post office clerks, technicians in state corporations and as fiercely competitive and successful traders. They had lived as a minority in a traditional and static society, resented as pushful intruders. A pogrom requires both a particular social situation and the exploitation of that situation by a politically organized group. In the North, social change had begun to produce a group of Northern entrepreneurs who were ready and eager to take over the businesses of the Ibo, the alien and successful minority on which could be projected odium and guilt for any state of crisis generated by change. The violence of a pogrom in the making can be contained where a government is strong or willing enough; in Nigeria the government proved that it was neither.

The killings were horrible enough, but even more horrible was their organization; for there is no doubt that, as in the May killings, there was deliberate and systematic organization. The organizers were the ex-politicians of the NPC, Native Authority functionaries, contractors, civil servants; their agents were unemployed thugs, provocateurs and rumour-mongers, but also young journalists and careerists who could manipulate information media and skills.\* The occasion was the shock of the con-

\*A government statement on the massacres (*New Nigerian*, 22 October 1966), says: 'Meanwhile in the North local petty contractors and party functionaries whose livelihood depended solely on party patronage became active. Most of them, like their political counterparts in other regions, were indebted

stitutional conference proposals to divide up the North. The opportunity presented was to drive the hated Ibos from the North once and for all.

The planning was not done overnight. There had been ominous signs of preparation for some while. The expatriate police officer and provincial secretary from Kana who, with help from the Emir, had stopped the May killings in the area very rapidly, were transferred, inexplicably and unexpectedly, in the weeks before September. There were the leaflets that made their appearance: 'You Northerners must help yourselves. Get up from your sleep'; and the messengers who brought the instruction that the leaflet would be the signal for action the following day. There was the duplicating machine brought by a group of four young men, used in the bush and then buried; so that days later when the police raided the Gaskiya Corporation, where one of the young men was employed, they drew a blank. There were collections to buy the wherewithal for the North to 'defend itself'.<sup>65</sup> Depending on the area, provocative rumours were slanted to incite local panic. The Tiv were told that Tiv students at Nsukka University in the East had had their eyes gouged out so that they could not learn; the Idoma were told that the Idoma Federal Minister in the former government had been killed in Enugu; the Birom were told that a train-load of Biram corpses had been delivered to Bukuru station.<sup>66</sup> A foreign correspondent in Kaduna was handed an eye-witness account of mob action outside the mosque and the house of the late Sardauna (the account was written in the past tense) an hour before anything happened in the town.\* In Bauchi a top civil servant had a list of Ibos in his hand, and was seen ticking them

\*Source: One-time editor of the *New Nigerian*.

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either to the Northern Marketing Board or the Northern Nigerian Development Corporation. They were the hardest hit by the change of government, especially all those indebted to the Marketing Board and the NNDC who were made to pay up their arrears. They resorted to whispering campaign, rumour-mongering, incitement, aided and abetted by other factors. They are the elements most close to the ordinary people and they have utilised that to create a public opinion which is very strong and potentially dangerous ...'

off as their deaths were reported; this was the one centre where several senior Ibo civil servants were killed. A district officer checking on the killings in his area asked a village head at Kandedun sugar plantation how many had been killed, and how many refugees there were. 'Did you kill any Ibo?' he asked. 'No,' was the reply. 'We did not get the message in time.'<sup>67</sup>

Not that there was any single cohesive inner planning group with squads of provocateurs and executioners. In a general atmosphere of diffused anti-Ibo provocation, it needed only a few inspired organizational touches, and a sense that authority would condone, even abet, attacks on Ibos, for the molestations of August and September\* to become wholesale butchery, especially when 4 Battalion cut loose at the end of September and soldiers went side by side with armed thugs on the rampage. The battalion which had started the July coup was not only transferred north to Kaduna after July, but, by hideous design or ineptness, it had a general post around its units. Wherever these went there was a spate of killings within hours of their arrival. They joined armed civilians in attacking Ibo areas indiscriminately, but also in making for special targets. From 4 Battalion the infection spread to the 2nd and later, in Kano, to the 5th, which mutinied on the parade ground when told that it was being flown to Nguru in Bornu to stop trouble there. It was this battalion that wreaked havoc, and the largest casualties of all, in the town and at the airport where Ibo refugees had gathered to be flown to safety.

There had been periodic attacks for some weeks on Easterners in various places in the North, but the worst killings occurred during the last week of September and the first week of October. One of the first major trouble spots was Minna. The *New Nigerian* received an eye-witness account from its own correspondent. That report was suppressed, and instead the paper published a brief Ministry of Information hand-out which

\*Apart from the reports of molestations broadcast by Enugu radio, incidents were recorded by persons living in the North. Some examples: On 5 September an Ibo contractor was killed in Kano; on 24 September the chief warden of Kaduna prison was killed in his house during the night by soldiers.

played down the incident. Two days later the paper received an editorial from the same ministry with instructions that it be published in full. *Genesis of the Exodus* it was called.

The historic exodus of the Ibos from some parts of the Federation has been misinterpreted to mean that this pre-planned exercise is confined only to Northern Nigeria. This is untrue and wicked. Why should we not summon courage to admit the fact that those so-called refugees have decided to migrate home *out of their own volition* (my emphasis), and that the North, as well as the West, the Mid-West and Lagos have witnessed this abnormal social phenomenon.<sup>68</sup>

On the day that the editorial appeared, the killings started up in Bauchi. Jos began to blaze the same afternoon; Zaria and Kaduna, the following day.

Curfew was imposed for the first time on the sixth day of the killings. Only with enormous difficulty were the authorities persuaded to organize the evacuation of Ibo civil servants. The press in the North, inhibited by official attitudes made only too clear, was censored or tongue-tied; during the first wave of killings, it carried not reports of the killings, but denials that they were taking place at all.<sup>69</sup> In the very week that they were reaching their peak, Gowen issued an instruction to all government staff who had 'deserted their posts' to return by a given deadline.<sup>70</sup> The day after the killings in Minna, the Northern military governor said publicly that the staff absences were a deliberate plan to paralyse the efficiency of the public service:

Assurances have been given that all living and working in the region are safe. In spite of assurances, employees in government service have found it necessary to desert their work on flimsy excuses of exaggerated allegations of threats. The plans are shortsighted in failing to observe that desertion by staff of their posts only causes hardship . . . and this affects the economy of the country, and the people as a whole.

Not only the killings, but official callousness seared the Ibos indelibly. Gowen's remonstrance – belated, provocative in its pointed reference to himself as a Northerner, almost half-hearted in its measured caution – did little to mollify them.

You all know [said the Supreme Commander], that since the end of July God in his power has entrusted the responsibility of this great country of ours into the hands of yet another Northerner. I receive

complaints daily that up till now Easterners living in the North are being killed and molested, and their property looted. I am very unhappy about this. We should put a stop to this. It appears that it is going beyond reason and is now at a point of recklessness and irresponsibility.<sup>71</sup>

By the time that the appeal was made, the storm had receded.

The official Federal version of the massacres explains that the disturbances in the North were reprisals for attacks on Northerners in the East; and that it was an inflammatory news report of these attacks carried by Radio Cotonou that had incited Northerners.\* The broadcast said: 'Travellers returning from Enugu have reported that many Northern Nigerians resident in the Eastern region were killed during the last weekend...'.<sup>72</sup> The incident to which it refers appears to have been the arrival of a lorry of refugees from the North who had been attacked and stripped at Makurdi; the news of this spread like wild-fire, and several Rausa men were set upon. (They were subsequently escorted by the police over the border; and by Ojukwu's orders, provincial secretaries were made directly responsible for the safe evacuation of non-Easterners.)<sup>73</sup> The Cotonou broadcast was delivered in French on 27 September. A monitored version found its way – presumably from the United States-staffed and operated Foreign Broadcast Information Service which does monitoring in the region by arrangement with the Northern authorities – to Kaduna's Information Ministry. There the item was transformed from a monitored news report into a government press release. Kaduna Radio broadcast it several times. **It** was issued by the Ministry to the *New Nigerian*.<sup>74</sup> The

• *Nigeria 1966* says on p. 10: 'There were certain disturbances in both Eastern and Northern regions after 1st August 1966. The first one started in some principal towns in the East around September 23.... The report of these incidents in the East were carried by radio stations in Cotonou and later at Kaduna and by some papers in Lagos and Kaduna. These radio and newspaper reports were soon followed by other disturbances in the North with Northerners retaliating with attacks on Ibos living in the North ...'

† See the letter to *Nigerian Opinion* No. 8/9 August-September 1967, by M. O. Raji: 'The pogrom of September 1966, and a pogrom it was, might not have been but for the propaganda launched by Radio Kaduna.... The news item [was] relayed over the network of Radio Kaduna several times on 28 and 29 September ...'

decision to release the Cotonou report under government information auspices was taken by a caucus of top Northerners, among them Ali Akilu, head of the civil service; the military governor cleared it. This was the week that the constitutional conference in Lagos issued its press release. It was apparent to the Northern traditionalists that they were being out-manoeuvred in Federal politics. The timing of the Kaduna repeats of the Cotonou broadcast suggests that this was their riposte; and they could scarcely have been unaware of the effects it would have in a region already launched on an anti-Ibo pogrom. When it was all over, the *New Nigerian* announced: 'No truth in Radio Cotonou report.' The paper's special correspondent in Port Harcourt had investigated and found nothing to substantiate the Radio Cotonou statement. In Lagos the government took into custody the young Nigerian newsman presumably responsible for a report, similar to the Cotonou item, which appeared in the Ibadan *Daily Sketch*. Thus the government officially nailed the Cotonou broadcast, which it called an 'unfounded rumour' in its announcement of a military inquiry into the Kano mutiny.<sup>75</sup> Yet by the following year, in *Nigeria 1966*, the 'unfounded rumour' that the government itself had denounced had become the official Federal version of the massacres in the North.<sup>76</sup>

Government – and, at its injunction, the press – had played down the full horror and magnitude of the killings. Once again the facts were shadowy, and propaganda could assume the substance. The version grew that the Ibos had run away from the North. When there could no longer be any reasonable doubt that massacres had indeed taken place, the response was: little wonder, since the Ibos had struck first. And by the time that, too, became an untenable excuse, it was an academic point. In the Federation, attitudes varied from a strange sense of perverted joy in some – not only in the North – to a blase indifference in others.<sup>77</sup> As for Easterners, after September they despaired of finding safety and security out of their own region. Close on two million people fled their way back into the Eastern region.\*

\* By the end of December the Eastern Nigerian rehabilitation commission estimated the number of refugees at 1,180,000. (*West Africa*, 26 December 1966, p. 1497.)

The panic exodus of May had been stemmed just in time for Ibos to receive the full impact of the September holocaust. Hardly an Ibo lineage had escaped unscathed; but if the scale of the disaster was hard to bear, the conviction that the rest of Nigeria neither knew nor cared was unendurable. At Kaduna, in the North, over one thousand unemployed thronged the Department of Posts and Telecommunications Training School, in response to an announcement over Radio Kaduna of two hundred vacancies, 'created by workers of Eastern Nigerian origin who had deserted their posts for home as a result of the present situation in the country'.<sup>78</sup>

### **'Old Boys' at Aburi; and at War**

There will be no war because the two old boys will meet at the frontier and tell each other – Old boy, we are not going to commit our boys to fight, come on, let us keep the politicians out – and that is the end.

General Ankrab at Aburi

The constitutional conference was resumed at Lagos in late October. No Eastern delegates attended. Ojukwu was also not present at the meeting of the Supreme Military Council, the first since the death of General Ironsi, at which it was decided to take political leaders into the government. Since they felt unsafe in Lagos, the Easterners insisted that Northern troops should be withdrawn from the West, and the police, not the army, have charge of security in the capital. 'Gowon is not in control,' said Ojukwu.<sup>79</sup> The impasse between Lagos and Enugu was punctuated only by bouts of verbal sharp-shooting. Each side accused the other of gun-running.\* Both sides were undoubtedly

<sup>78</sup> Towards the end of October a DC-4 carrying a thousand sub-machine-guns crashed in the North Cameroons. For the Lagos case see *Sunday Times* Insight report, 23 October 1966; for the Eastern version see *Africa* 1966, No. 21, 29 October 1966, p. 5.

This *did* not include more than 45,000 refugees absorbed by the Mid-West. (*New Nigerian*, 15 December 1966.) The number of dead was estimated at 30,000.

stock-piling arms, and reorganizing their armies. The East by September had been left with almost no arms, merely the shreds of an officer corps, and hardly any riflemen (only general duty troops). What contact there remained between Gowan and Ojukwu was carried on by telephone, by letter, or, vicariously, between Enugu's radio station and answering denials and accusations from the other side.

As the weeks went by, Lagos was preoccupied less with the Eastern region's absence from the constitutional talks than with the signs in the West that the old Action Group leadership was restless and moving closer to the East. The West was lukewarm on the question of states, and its constitutional formula was a compromise between federation and confederation. In late November Gowan announced that the constitutional conference was indefinitely postponed. It had run into difficulties which made it impossible for further meetings to take place. A few days later, he came down decisively against confederation, and for the creation of from eight to fourteen new states under an effective central authority.<sup>80</sup> This, charged Ojukwu, was Gowan's attempt to isolate the regional governments and to run the country with a clique of senior civil servants mainly drawn from a certain ethnic group.<sup>81</sup> **If** a constitution were to be imposed on Eastern Nigeria, the period of negotiation seemed now to be at an end.

It was Mr Malcolm MacDonald, B-britain's peripatetic diplomatic fixer in Africa, who set up the Aburi meeting in January 1967 between Nigeria's estranged leaders. Ghana's General Ankrah was prompted to invite both sides, and to act as host; he and police inspector General Harlley sat in on the Aburi sessions and even broke anxiously into the discussion when it got acrimonious. ('I am sure no tempers will rise because I have put a lovely bowl of flowers here with God's grace in it,' said General Ankrah.) The central issue for the Easterners was clearly the legitimacy of the Gowan government. It was Major Mobalaje Johnson, governor of Lagos, who opened the wound. '**If** you still have lice in your head, there will be blood on your fingers,' he said; and continued: 'May I ask one question. Gentlemen, is there a central government in Nigeria today?'

To which Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu replied, with blistering stress on the 'simple': 'That question is such a *simple* one and anyone who has been listening to what I have been saying all the time would know that I do not see a central government in Nigeria today.'<sup>82</sup> The parting of the ways had come about because the hold on Lagos was 'by force of conquest'. Gowon, said Ojukwu, was Supreme Commander

by virtue of the fact that you head or that you are acceptable to people who mutinied against their commander, kidnapped him and had taken him away. We are all military officers. **If** an Officer is dead- Oh! he was a fine soldier- we drape the national flag on him, we give him due honours and that is all. The next person steps in. So the actual fact in itself is a small thing with military men, but hierarchy, order is very important, discipline are *sine qua non* for any organization which prides itself for being called an army. [These remarks of Ojukwu's are taken from the verbatim record.]

Hierarchy, order and discipline were all-important, his army colleagues agreed; but mutiny was another thing. During the July crisis days, Ojukwu had told Brigadier Ogundipe that it was for 'the responsible officers of the army to get together'. He himself had been present when Ojukwu talked on the telephone to Ogundipe, Commodore Wey said. It was all very well for Ojukwu to read the list of army precedence, he implied; but 'I must say one thing, that it is impossible for any man to expect to command any unit which he has not got control over.... **If** an ordinary sergeant can tell a Brigadier - "I do not take orders from you until my Captain comes", I think this is the limit, and this is the truth about it.' In a private off-the-record session, Ojukwu was given an account of Ironsi's death. ('For all the East knows the former Supreme Commander is only missing, and until such a time that they know his whereabouts they do not know any other Supreme Commander,' he had insisted.) By the end of the meeting Ojukwu was insisting that he had nothing personal against Gowon and, to the surprise of the conference, asked for the 'honour' of nominating him as Chairman of the Supreme Military Council, when the agreement reached at Aburi had been implemented. But the Aburi communique, vague and ambiguous, papered over very conflicting purposes.

Certainly, the record of proceedings shows that these were far from plain sailing.

At issue was the control of the army; was it to be in the hands of the Supreme Military Council or the Commander ?

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OJUKWU: While I agree that the Supreme Military Council should stay ... the legislative and executive authority of the Federal Military government should be vested in the ... Council because previously it was vested in the Supreme Commander. What I envisage is that whoever is at the top is a constitutional chap, constitutional within the context of the military government.... He is the titular head, but he would only act when we have met and taken a decision ... by so doing our people will have the confidence that whatever he says must at least have been referred to us all ...

CoLONEL AnEBAYO: I do not think there is anything wrong provided the Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council do not go into things affecting the regions without consulting the Governors.... The only thing I would like to add is because of the state of the army itself, I would like to see an effective Commander of the army.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OJUKWU: I will object completely to that last one. We started by agreeing that nobody can effectively command the entire army ... what I have said is that the army should be commanded on a regional basis.

CoLONEL AnEBAYO: **If** we have those regional commands do you not want somebody on top to co-ordinate ?

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OJUI<WU: I said there should be a co-ordinating group to which each region should send somebody, but just for the facade of Nigeria there should be a titular Commander-in-Chief not a Supreme Commander which involves and means somebody who commands over and above the other entities. Perhaps after we have created and generated certain confidence we could again have a Supreme Commander, but it is not feasible today ...

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL HASSAN: With respect, to summarise the whole thing. The Eastern region will not recognise whoever is the Supreme Commander in the form of association we have now and it means a repetition of the whole history of Nigeria when the politicians were there, to strive to put either a Northerner or an Easterner at the top. It must be an Easterner for Easterners to believe or a Northerner for the Northerners to believe. To summarise, the Eastern people will not recognise anybody in Lagos unless he is an Easterner.

CoLONIL AnEBAYO: I do not think we should put it that way.

The session in progress was adjourned at this uneasy juncture.

The Aburi communiques are vague on many issues. As far as the army went, it was to be governed by a Supreme Military Council under a chairman who would be known as commander-in-chief, and would be head of the Federal military government. All regions were to be equally represented at military headquarters, and promotions were to be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council. Any decision affecting the whole country was to be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council; or, if a meeting were not possible, referred to the military governors for comment and agreement.<sup>83</sup> But no record is available of the two secret sessions which discussed the powers of the head of state; and even the two verbatim reports, one Federal, the other Eastern, differ in several respects. If anything was decided, it was to loosen connexions and weaken the old federal tie between centre and region.<sup>84</sup>

Aburi was no sooner over than the argument started over what had been decided. Three weeks after the meeting, General Gowon issued a statement on Aburi<sup>85</sup> which said that the old Federal constitution would operate; and that, far from being abandoned, the state scheme, under an effective central authority, was 'more urgent than ever'. In between Aburi and this pronouncement, Federal permanent secretaries had met in Lagos, dissected the agreement, and advised Gowon to disown it.<sup>86</sup> In the East the slogan was 'On Aburi We Stand'. In Lagos a draft decree made its appearance, ostensibly to implement the Aburi decisions, but effectively to do the opposite. One final attempt was made to reach agreement round the conference table, this time with legal experts and top civil servants in the seats. Towards the end of March, a 'little Aburi' took place in Ghana, at the Ghanaian government's apparent initiative once again; but this time, in the presence of the Ghanaian attorney-general and other officials. The meeting consisted largely of a dialogue between the attorney-generals of Nigeria and Ghana. By the end of the meeting, the Ghanaian participants took the view that the decree was not an implementation of the Aburi agreement, but, indeed, contrary to the accord reached there. The powers given the Supreme Commander were, for

one, totally inconsistent with collective regional control of the army.\*

The decree that was finally promulgated on 17 March 1967 reflected Aburi up to a point. It gave the regional military governors the right of veto on most important issues, including any decision to carve new states out of their respective regions. The Supreme Commander became Chairman of the Supreme Military Council, and the army was to be controlled by this Council. But the decree incorporated an emergency powers clause (like that held by the civilian Federal government before the coups under sections 70, 71 and 86 of the old constitution) permitting the Supreme Military Council to declare a state of emergency under which, ominously, 'appropriate measures' could be taken against any region that might 'endanger the continuance of Federal government in Nigeria'. The state of emergency could be declared by the head of government with the concurrence of at least three of the military governors. The other three against the East? Under Balewa, the emergency powers of the constitution had been used as a political weapon to oust the Action Group from power in the West; the East feared that the same power would be used to bring down the Ojukwu regional government.

As the conflict sharpened, secession was to be presented as an act of rebellion against Nigeria's legitimate government. In a contest of legalities, which could claim greater legitimacy: Ojukwu's government, or Gowon's? It depended on which side

\*The proceedings were tape-recorded but have not been released. The meeting was referred to by C. C. Mojeku, for Biafra, at the Kampala peace talks. Ojukwu, in an interview with Suzanne Cronje, said of it: 'Indeed the last four hours of that meeting was Ghana versus Lagos and the North . . . . It was quite amusing. On arrival at the meeting the Mid-West immediately got up and said "Gentlemen, we are here as observers.'" And they had travelled all along with Lagos on the same plane! Lagos was so completely confused. No sooner they said that and sat down than the West said they had been asked to observe, not to contribute. So that immediately cleared both the Mid-West and the West. The Ghanaians took over very quickly almost within the first hour and a half. They had done their homework. They had studied critically the Aburi meeting, studied the Decree and everything. They came in and put it quite plainly to Lagos. Finally Lagos had to admit, first of all, that the Decree is not Aburi but Aburi as amended by Lagos . . . .'

you were. The Nigeria of the politicians and the constitution of the First Republic had disintegrated with the collapse of that government. Any line of 'legitimate' political authority, however spurious in the hands of politicians who fixed the system and alienated the electorate, was severed then. After January 1966 guns, not constitutions, became the arbiter. But the form of the constitution, for all the elaborate formulations and tortuous discussion, was of little real importance. In the violent state of the country, the real issue was control of the army command. The EIsern region tried at Aburi to negotiate a sufficient share in the management of the armed forces; and when that failed, it no longer felt safe inside the Federation.

By the end of March 1967 the two sides had resorted to economic war. The East had argued at Aburi that the old basis of fiscal relations had been undermined: Easterners could no longer work freely or set up businesses in the North; the population of the East had been swollen by an influx that amounted to an increase of 16 per cent in six months; the Eastern civil service had been swollen by about half, and among the refugees there were 6,000 unemployed railway workers alone. Arrangements were made at Aburi for the Federal government to carry some of these costs; but nothing was done. The sum in dispute, said the East, was over £ro million, including the East's share of Federal revenues; but the Federal budget made no concessions to the needs of the East. So the Eastern regional government issued a Revenue Collection Edict to assert control over its own railways, ports, posts and telegraphs, coal and electricity. Meanwhile the Supreme Military Council had met – without Ojukwu, of course– to devise a three-year programme for return to civilian rule, which included the creation of states, and the introduction of civilians into government.

The Action Group in the West was badly racked at this time. Awolowo fleetingly championed the Eastern cause in a statement suggesting that 'what some people with influence in government circles now want is to help Eastern Nigeria out of Nigeria, and to try to form a new federation on terms which are already cut and dried by them from among the remaining units'.<sup>88</sup> Tillis was the time that the West, through the Western military governor,

was demanding the withdrawal of all Northern soldiers from the region and from Lagos. Confederation was tempting to the West, because it would leave the region freer of central control, and its experience of the latter was still raw. But as the tide turned from confederation to a strong federal centre, the Yoruba were swept along with it. They needed Federal jobs in the civil service and the corporations; and where there were top jobs for educators, businessmen and civil servants, the political tendencies followed. Awolowo himself was indecisive-it took the inner circle of the Action Group five full days to make up its mind on the issue of states – but eventually he opted for continued association with the forces closest to him. After his statement on the danger of letting the East secede, he had a police guard over him during the next crucial weeks; and he was, in any event, offered the posts of Commissioner of Finance and Vice-Chairman of the Federal Executive Council. **If** Western secession in sympathy with the East was ever seriously contemplated, the West, without any support in the army, was demonstrably too feeble even to try it.

In the East, Ojukwu told the Consultative Assembly that they were at the cross-roads: they could accept the terms of Northern Nigeria and of Gowon; continue the stalemate and drift; or ensure survival by asserting their autonomy. Outside the meeting, student demonstrators were demanding secession. On 27 May, Gowon declared a state of emergency, assumed full powers and decreed the existence of twelve states which, among other consequences, landlocked the East Central state of the Ibo people. On 30 May, the state of Biafra was proclaimed. Five weeks later, on 6 July 1967, Nigeria and Biafra were at war.

In Lagos, the permanent secretaries who did the thinking for the centre had seen clearly that declaration on states was a race against time and secession. **If** Ojukwu seceded first, they calculated, it could be claimed that he had never been part of the states scheme. A leading official told me: 'The psychological need was to beat Ojukwu to it, so that we could defend the creation of states internationally.' This, Lagos achieved. The creation of states and the emergency declaration were devised

as a package deal. As Dent has said,<sup>9</sup> the creation of the states represented the concession which the Federal military government had to make to the Middle-Belters for their participation in the war against Biafra.

On the eve of war, the Federal government was far from monolithic; what popularity it achieved was provided by the conflict with the East and Ojukwu. The offer of new states consolidated the support of minorities within a very rickety Federation. The war steadied this structure, by giving it an external enemy.

In the form in which it emerged, the states scheme was in part a creation of young Northerners who had begun to assert themselves after January, when the die-hards of the old administration were palsied by the shock of the Sardauna's death. It was this group that in a memorandum to the Northern military governor urged training for all services – regional, federal, commercial, industrial and small private business-'so organised as to assume that all Ibos will go *en masse* and immediately'.<sup>10</sup> From this group –some of them academics, but most of them professionally trained civil servants of the same generation as the military men in power – emanated, some time between March and April 1967, not only the first draft map of the twelve states, but also a 'Strategy for Survival' after Aburi.<sup>91</sup> Gowon would be acceptable as head of state, their policy document said; any clash between Northerners would be disastrous. This could be avoided by evolving a more 'dynamic' and 'forward-looking society' (which, with characteristic bureaucratic incomprehension, they thought should be defined by a full-time central planning committee; composed, presumably, of civil servants in the main); by neutralizing some of the ex-politicians known to be corrupt and discredited; and by guiding change in the North into 'constructive channels'. Aburi had been a victory for Ojukwu, because the other members of the Supreme Council had been 'too eager to appease'. The solution, said the young Turks of the North, was the simultaneous creation of states which would 'sustain the efforts of the minorities in their struggle against the tyrannical government of Ojukwu'.

The states scheme was thus an operational decision for

imminent war rather than part of a carefully structured new constitution for a more equitable distribution of power in a new federation. It calculated on turning the minority areas of the East into its soft under-belly, and on depriving the Ibos of Port Harcourt, their outlet to the sea, as well as most of the oil in the region. Inside the Federation, the states scheme struck several bargains in the division of power. The breaking of the North into six states at last met the Middle-Belt demand for autonomy. Carving large states into smaller ones quietened the anxiety of the little Mid-West state, previously squeezed between giants. The declaration of a separate Lagos state kept the seaport under Federal control and denied the Western region – lest it contemplate secession itself – access to the sea; it also gave the Lagotian elitists, ever detractors of the populist politicians in the Action Group, a leverage against Awolowo's influence in the West and at the centre.

In the old Federation, the minority peoples undoubtedly had grievances. And the states scheme may solve some of these. It has, some say, given control of the Federal government to the minorities. They run government at the centre and are able to draw on its resources; they furnish most of the soldiers in the Federal fighting forces; they hold the key permanent secretaryships and they sit on top of the richest oil fields. At last they have found the way to escape from the political dominance and economic deprivation that they suffered at the hands of the three major groups in the old federal structure.<sup>92</sup> But if there is little justice in the domination of minorities by majorities, then there is scarcely more justice in the reverse. Large tribe chauvinism was destructive enough; will small tribe chauvinism be any less so?

The thorniest minority problem is undoubtedly that of those which formerly belonged in the East. The states scheme has been manifestly effective in creating minority groups with a vested interest (especially *oil*) in the defeat of Biafra. Except in the clamour and cruelty of the war, the minorities have not been asked at all where they wish to belong. Biafra stated its willingness to allow the minorities themselves to decide their future by plebiscite. But plebiscites belong to peace settlements; the issue

of the minorities, as of Biafra, will be decided by the way that the war is won or lost. Among the numberless casualties will be those principles of the right to self-determination, or the wrong of secession, which in abstract argument decide all, and in battle settle nothing.

If the new state structure belatedly brought minorities in from the cold, it deliberately pushed the Ibo out. Nigeria claims the states scheme to be the most broadly based federal union yet created in Africa voluntarily by Africans, as distinct from colonial federal establishments; yet, in the process, it went to war with one of the three major constituents of the original Federation. For the trouble with the states scheme is that it did almost as much as the massacres to persuade Biafrans that their enemies were bent on their total destruction.

The threat, and then the act of secession, made first the states scheme and then the war inevitable, it is said. The Ibos were set on secession, and there was no turning them back. Secession is the trump card that North, West and East had each threatened, at one time or another, to pull from the pack. The North fingered the card most frequently, and- until the departure of the East – most recently; as when the mutiny of July 1966 started as a Northern secession coup. Indeed, up to and during the constitutional talks of September 1966, prominent Northern civil servants, including the former head of the service, were saying publicly that the only way out for the North was to go it alone. (At this time, a team of foreign road experts, brought in by the Northern Ministry of Finance, was investigating the possibility of building roads from the region through Dahomey, so as to cut the North's dependence on the South for an outlet to the sea.) But, in the event, it was the Easterners – whose political associations had led the movement for close and effective Nigerian unity, and who, of all Nigerians, moved most energetically across regional boundaries into all parts of the country – who struck out for secession.

Eastern secession thinking had reared strongly during the 1964 Federal crisis; but then it had receded, and the politician-businessmen had buckled down again to their manipulative politics inside the Federation. As the January 1966 coup and its

aftermath in the Ironsi government had exposed, not one but two (at least) Ibo political tendencies – the radicalism, however inchoate, of the young majors and their counterparts among the intellectuals, who wanted a purged political system throughout the country; and, side by side, Ibo chauvinism that used Ironsi's government to assert not new policies but elite Ibo interests- so, too, the Eastern crisis produced both secessionists and a unity camp.\*

The January coup was hailed in some Ibo quarters, as it was reviled in others, as an Ibo achievement; and those who thought in these terms, many of Ironsi's closest advisers among them, set out to make the most of their opportunity. The backlash of the May attacks produced some initial panic; but the great majority of the refugees who fled to the East filtered back to their homes, employment and business in other parts of the country. The July coup caused a fresh exodus of surviving Ibo soldiers and officers, and, in their wake, of Ibo federal public servants and academics. Now the scares seemed to come too often to be discounted. Support began to grow for an extreme form of regionalism, and many once ardent for unity began to think of secession. Oil revenue would make the East a viable economic unit, and Ibos, spurned in the rest of the Federation, would turn their backs on it and devote themselves to building their own region's prosperity. Displaced civil servants and academics formed the core of a secession lobby.<sup>93</sup> During the three days at the end of July and the beginning of August 1966, when Nigeria had no government at the centre, and the North seemed about to secede, the Eastern Cabinet was united on secession; it was the emergence of Gowon at the centre that brought divided opinions, according to the account of the former attorney-general, who later defected.<sup>94</sup> Then, with the massacres in the

\*Some indication of the split *within* the Eastern camp *is* revealed in the Federal publication *Nigeria: The Dream Empire of a Rebel* (Ministry of Information, Lagos). Based on documents captured at Enugu, it reproduces a dialogue between Ojukwu and Philip Alale, a major in the Biafran army. Ojukwu argued 'that victory will be through our own singular effort as a people, excluding the Mid-West and the West', and Alale that this 'overlooks the potential revolutionary role of the peoples of the West and Mid-West and even of the North who dread the rule of the Fulani-Hausa oligarchy'.

North, a mood of outrage and defiance spread throughout the region. The pressures of a lobby became a steadily rising popular clamor for making a break or, at least, setting some distance from a Federation that persecuted and massacred Ibos because they were Ibo. Aburi brought a spurt of hope; but then Lagos reneged on the agreement. Many not fervent for secession before Aburi, changed sides after its failure. And side by side with the growing secession movement in these months went Eastern government planning for a reconstituted army and administration that could function independently of Lagos, in case the conflict should, after all, end in a break.

Yet at the same time there were also, within the region, deep pockets of uncertainty about secession; and of opposition, too. The opposition camp, which included trade-union youth activists, and Major Nzeogwu, the hero of January, still placed its hopes for a changed Nigeria in a Southern unity of East and West, against what it characterized as the reactionary feudal North. But Nzeogwu was falling from official grace in the East during the anxious months before the war. He surrendered his position as Director of Military Operations, through which he had played a key part in training the region's reconstituted army.

Some people [he wrote) still consider me a rival for popularity with the masses and they feel unsafe with me around. Every military training exercise in which I figured prominently was thought to be a plan for another coup! There are many questions on the political problems created by the collaboration of Awo with the Gowon regime. We still want to know the facts.... The leadership [in the East] fears my popularity, resents my views on the national issues of the day, and people imagine that I am ambitious.... My confidence has never been stronger in the ability of our enlightened and honest folks. There are still a lot of them left even after the calamitous 1966.

Three weeks earlier he had written:

Our camp is in disarray ... our contact with the masses is apparent, not real. ... In our lethargy we shall be witnesses to the rending asunder of the national fabric and the biting away of large chunks of our territory by monarchs of reaction and tribal mob leaders.... Even if we become a confederation with component territories

governed in the same manner as the whole republic was previously governed, the same political malaise will remain until progressive men with progressive ideas and executing progressive actions take hold of the helm of state affairs. . . .96

Traumatized by their losses in the July coup, and by the massacres that followed, the Ibo people turned in on themselves. Whether elite lobbying incited popular pressure, or the popular clamour itself stiffened elite support for secession, is difficult to say. After the failure of Aburi, and with the start of the economic war at the end of March, attitudes hardened at all levels. Inside Biafra, as inside the Federation, military government had put curbs on popular participation. Consultative assemblies were summoned, but they were totally dependent on the government for information and the scope of their decisions. As the months went by, there seemed so few options in any event. Federal terms seemed calculated to offer the East only humiliation. Doubts and minority points of view were deferred and finally abandoned as the crisis deepened; and patriotism, with a national war effort, became a condition of survival.

Yet hopes of a Southern unity, with the West rising to join the East in radicalizing the Federation, persisted in some quarters even during the first phase of the war. They died in August 1967, when Biafran occupation of the Mid-West failed, and the drive of the Biafran army on Lagos was beaten back at the battle for Ore, in the Western region, 135 miles from the capital. Then the Yorubas, who had been perched on the fence, dramatically switched allegiance to the Federal government.<sup>97</sup> Events seemed once again to justify the secessionists. There seemed nothing for it but to discount all other forces inside the Federation, and to strike out, Biafra for itself.

The Mid-West campaign was the most vital of the war. Facing setbacks on the three military fronts – Nsukka, Ogoja and Bonny – the Biafran army had planned a lightning advance on Lagos and Ibadan. Key to the plan was a coup inside the Federal units stationed in the Mid-West. Inside those units the Ibo were outnumbered two to one in the ranks; but of the eleven officers, eight were Mid-West Ibo. The Biafran army invasion on 9 August was led by a Yoruba officer, Lieutenant-Colonel

Victor Banjo, who had been imprisoned by Ironsi for allegedly plotting against him, and when released had taken a commission in the Biafran army. Benin fell from within as the army coup coincided with the troop infiltration: Banjo proclaimed the Republic of Benin; and the Biafran army set its sights on Ibadan, where, it was thought, Yoruba support would reinforce attempts to change the government in Lagos and thus the face of the Federation. Some say that the fortunes of the war were reversed irrevocably when a misadventure on the road blocked the advance of the Biafran troops long enough for the Federal forces to rally reinforcements and rout the Biafrans. This was a serious military setback, but in addition pronounced political differences emerged on the Biafran side: Colonel Banjo promoted himself brigadier (which enabled him to outrank Ojukwu) and declared the Mid-West under his liberation army to be independent of both sides. It was at this point that a coup d'etat against Ojukwu began to unfold. Once again, Ifeajuna was part of it. It was to be a 'One Nigeria' coup to remove both Ojukwu and Gowon; and, if Awolowo played his part, to install him in power at the centre. Suddenly, when the Biafran army was in a more favourable position than it ever achieved at any time of the war, Banjo ordered his troops to evacuate Benin, without firing a shot. (This was on 12 September; and Nigerian troops did not enter the city until 21 September.) There were similar withdrawal orders elsewhere on the front. And the effect on the Biafran army was devastating. As General Modiebo described the impact of the Banjo-Ifeajuna coup: 'Morale was so low that a shot fired in the air would disband a whole battalion.' Not long after, four men were court-martialled and shot in Enugu. They included Banjo and Major Ifeajuna. He had not made the January coup to liquidate Nigeria, said Banjo— whose claim to have played a part in the first coup is as yet unsubstantiated. But if this coup was directed at reuniting Nigeria, its effect was to persuade Biafrans that anything short of total commitment to their own victory would weaken them.

The war, generally expected to be over within a few weeks, dragged on for thirty-one months.\* The way of life on either

\* Biafra collapsed suddenly in January 1970.

side of the battle-line was as difficult to reconcile as the issues that divided them. Biafra was pronounced doomed from the first days of the war, but was a long time dying. Even as the new state was squeezed into a tiny land-locked enclave that became a children's graveyard – with malnutrition, if not mortars, threatening an entire generation – its people fought back with a determination, a resilience and a panache that spoke of an ardour for their cause that left the other side mystified or infuriated. 'They are all paranoics,' a young poet in Lagos said in desperation. 'How can they not know and tell the difference between victory and defeat? If all must die, who will tenant the earth?' In Biafra, even in the worst days of the war, there were strange and obstinate survivals of the sedate British-patterned life of the better-off: obsessional red-tape bureaucracy and glaring rich-poor inequalities, alongside impressive improvisation for war, suffering and sacrifice. On the Federal side, the war was fought by a conventional army (conscripts, if not of any recruiting law, then of unemployment), while within the elite the most rigorous war effort was a fiercer than usual verbosity for the 'national' cause. In the Federation, the front was far away – except for the few anxious days of the Mid-West invasion. In the capital, if patriotism was most fervent there, so too were the flippancy and frivolity of war, as the wives of the elite hi-lifed round charity balls to raise comforts for the troops, and their husbands – the velvet-cushion commandos, as Wole Soyinka has called them – rode into office and influence on a wave of zeal for all Federal policies and causes. In Biafra there was not only fear, real or imagined, of annihilation by the enemy in war, but the conviction that Ibos would have no future in a Nigeria even at peace.

Within the Federation it was said that Ibos would be re-integrated without difficulty in the Nigeria emerging victorious from the war; or the loaded qualification, 'Yes, they can come back. We know the Ibos will, and they will settle in again- as long as they've learnt their lesson.' Will Ibos find a place – except in small numbers and in menial roles, now that the economy and, above all, the market for jobs and office have adjusted to their absence? It took a pogrom and a war to relieve the pressure

on posts for university vice-chancellors, judges, top civil servants, bank and post office clerks, lawyers and corporation men. There is no more gruesome commentary on why Nigeria went to war with itself.

There is also no more inflammable issue in Africa than secession. Nigeria saw it as setting off a chain of fission inside the Federation which might bring down the whole precarious state structure. Africa sees it as showing that there is nothing permanent – and why *should* there be? – about former colonial borders supposedly fixed with independence. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), which identifies its own only hope of survival in a formalistic recognition of the sovereignty and authority of existing states – its constituent members, after all – has refused to dissect the causes or the course of the conflict. To probe the sensitive area of how and why the Nigerian state broke into two pieces, entails a recognition that it is not enough for independence government to have inherited authority from the colonial power: **if** this is the failing of Nigeria's generation of independence politicians, how many of the OAU member-states are immune? Biafra's case was Africa's nightmare, because Nigeria mirrored the breakdown, actual or incipient, of so many of the continent's independent states and their elite governments.

Biafra's case was also agonizing because it produced the most capricious alignment of powers, both European and African, on the two sides of this African war. Their reasons or rationalizations can have their origin not in the intrinsic issues at stake in the conflict, but in their own particular interests, in Africa or in the world. Disputes between the two antagonists, already difficult enough to resolve, were made much more so by the intervention of big powers. Yet, however outside forces manipulated it, Biafra's secession was not externally instigated; it arose out of the innermost failures of the Nigerian political system. Biafra, it was argued by some seeking to explain their championship of Nigeria, is another Katanga: Ojukwu is a second Tshombe, and the role of Union Miniere is being played by international oil companies. The analogy has been shown to be hollow.<sup>9B</sup> Oil was not primarily the issue that led to secession

in the first place. Oil revenues have, however, grown more central to the conflict, because essentially the war had its origins in intra-elite disputes over power and oil helps to pay for power.

The war was three weeks old when Wole Soyinka issued a poignant appeal for a temporary ceasefire. Ojukwu, he argued, must realize by now that the act of secession was, at the least, a miscalculation. The Federal government, for its own part, needed to recast the entire situation, this time basing its calculation not on guns but on the primary factor of the human will. The 'swift surgical operation' was being conducted with blunt and unsterile scalpels, despite the obvious superiority of Federal arms. The government might well prove its military superiority, but it had also to demonstrate a sense of the future. 'When the East has been overrun, what happens to the Ibo people?' The Federal government was faced with a choice of wiping out all the Ibos or administering a nation which had developed a core of implacable hate and resolution. 'There will be no victory for anyone in the present conflict, only a repetition of human material waste and a superficial control that must one day blow up in our faces and blow the country finally to pieces.... A fight to the finish will finish all, or nothing....'<sup>99</sup> There was one additional compelling reason why some way had to be found to end the strife, wrote Soyinka. Fleetinglly, in the Nigeria of 1966, it had seemed that at long last 'the new generation was about to march together, irrespective of religion or origin'. Then there emerged once again 'the by now familiar brigade of professional congratulators, opportunists, patriots and other sordid racketeers, the cheer-leaders of a national disaster whose aim was to exploit Ojukwu's blunders to camouflage their own game of power and position.' Soyinka spent the first two years of the war in prison. The old game of power and position continued to be played, though in this period to the sound of gunfire.

## The Army: Thirteenth State

The army 'is battling . . . with the conversion of hooligans and thugs . . . but in any case it is better to keep them in the army and get them disciplined rather than let them loose in the society'.

Brigadier Ejoor, December 1968

On both sides of the war, power lay with the army men and the administrators controlling the state apparatus. The politicians had been called in; but essentially they discharged their functions by will of the military, as both Awolowo and Azikiwe in their different ways discovered.

In Nigeria's Second Republic, control passed decisively from the politicians into the hands of the power bureaucrats. When, on the eve of war, the civil servants and the army were in the midst of their own crisis, they summoned some of the politicians to give the regime a base of popular support. But though these were to run the ministries with virtually the same powers that the former feudal ministers had exercised, they were to operate under the army, in the context of decisions already taken, formally by the soldiers and by the administrators in fact. The military regime had decreed no political parties; and this meant, ostensibly, no politics. Dislodged from parties and government, where they had formerly manipulated communal support, political forces continued their manipulations, but without the old outlets afforded by regional and federal government. Disputes that were once settled by a process of bargaining among the parties or by deals of political expediency now flared into street action (the May and September killings) or came for arbitration before civil servants and soldiers. **If** expediency was the way of the politicians, the combination of civil servants and army was infinitely more lethal. It is hard to say whether Nigeria might not have gone to war with itself under a civilian government; but surely it would not have done so with such deadly swiftness. The parties and the politicians used tribalism for their own ends; but the very existence of parties insulated the country to some extent from its most explosive forms. Communal conflicts were in part processed through the party, to emerge

amended somewhat and more subdued; communal tensions might be dissipated or absorbed in prolonged political manoeuvring. Perhaps this is where Nigerians got their reputation for riding to the brink, and then reining back. The power-bureaucrats have ridden at a gallop; and, in their bravado, did without the reins.

Army men pride themselves on their speed of resolution (it must undoubtedly be easier to reach decisions when you exclude so many 'political' factors). And civil servants like nothing better than principals who are brief and to the point, make up their minds and rarely change them and, above all, defer to them, the trained experts. To bureaucrats of the military and civilian order, all problems have a starkly administrative cast, and any particular problem has a single and direct solution. To the Ironsi government, unification meant a decree that unified the civil service. To the Gowon government, the creation of states meant a decree; and, if the Ibos had stayed, or been frightened, away from the crucial decree-shaping consultation, it was a decree binding on them none the less. An agreement reached at Aburi, after delicate consultation, was countermanded by another decree, written by civil service hands. The army-bureaucrats rejected the methods and motives of the politicians; but substituted nothing at all, except for the terms of reference that their own specialist training-and own group interests - had instilled.

This does not mean that, even under the First Republic, the bureaucracy did not exercise a large corporate slice of influence in the state, though government was manipulated by the more flamboyant politicians. With the displacement and overshadowing of the political class by the January coup, however, control was centralized in the corporate groups of civil servants and army, which used the politicians selectively and had the power, through the gun, to circumscribe their freedom of action. Roles had been reversed; the bureaucrats were on top. Successive crises were diagnosed and treated according to the needs of these two corporate groups, the civil service and the army. In one crisis after another, under both the Ironsi and the Gowon governments, civil servants and soldiers, or aspirant bureaucrats - like students at the universities, or at the training institute

for administrators, or at the air force college – sounded national alarms and used the powers of the state when their own interests seemed to be under attack. The interests of civil servants were at the centre of the successive crises in 1966, 1967 and 1968. Decree 34, which threatened the security of a relatively small group of Nigerians, the top Northern civil servants, as well as those who hoped to graduate into these posts, resulted in the May killings and the destruction of the Ironsi government. The weight of Ibo officer-corps promotions in the army was one of the major grievances that stirred the July coup-makers. The drive for new states came from new elites whose members saw in each a job apparatus that would absorb them, giving new men the big jobs and the rapid promotions that independence and Africanization had given to the earlier elites of the African states. At every stage of the constitutional debate- Decree 34; Aburi; the arguments over federal, confederal or unitary government – there has been one prime calculation, in addition to any others that might have been entertained: unification meant that federal posts would be allocated to regional functionaries of high calibre, and men at the centre might be displaced; a federal system tightly controlled from the centre would mean enhanced status and power for the top men of the federal civil service. The interests of the Federal bureaucrats were best served by the preservation of the Federation. But as the crisis developed, the 'unity' forces closed their ranks against the candidates from a large part of the country, the Eastern region. An important group of competitors has been excluded. But, at the same time, new competitors, from the new states, are forming a queue. The shortage of resources and, in a few years, the hardening of promotion opportunities inside the twelve states, could bring a new round of acrimonious and ugly conflict within the elite.

In the Second Republic, the states scheme and the war have thrown up new candidates for the ranks of the privileged and the manipulators of politics and business. The fall of the Balewa regime saw some members of the old 'political class' effaced; temporarily only, they themselves hoped. (Some were forcefully displaced by the corruption probes; others, like Inuwa Wada

in Kano, took a back seat in politics while they devoted themselves to business.) The demands of the war made it a lean time for some kinds of entrepreneurship. The most lucrative tenders were for the army, where regular army contractors, or the new ones who had been quick to cultivate army contacts for this and other reasons, got the pickings. It is too soon to tell to what extent the Nigerian officer corps has followed in the best Nigerian traditions of using office to acquire economic interests; but there were murmurs from the other ranks that some officers did not want the war to end, because that would bring an end to the loot as well.

The states scheme produced a large crop of fresh candidates for political and economic power. A new state offers unprecedented openings in politics, business and the bureaucracy; and if the Mid-West state is anything to go by, new elites\* devour resources even faster than did the old. For the time being, while the ban on parties lasts, the first in the queue are the civil servants and the representatives of communal or local interests who, in the absence of political parties, gravitate around the administrators or the army men in power. Inside the West, the pressure on the fastest-growing and largest elite is nearer bursting point than ever; but *in* the North the expulsion of the Ibos left a welcome vacuum for Northerners at levels both humble and elevated, and the creation of new states is bringing new echelons to office in each of them. Emirs, the young men feel, should reign not rule. Though three of the six Northern states remain powerful emirates, Native Authorities have lost their control over police, courts and prisons, and young men are coming to the fore in local government and other manifestations of reform.

How different, though, will the new guard be from the old? Or from those in the Southern elite, who were so much more

\*The Begho Tribunal in Benin was told by Dr I. C. Doppler, described as an industrial promoter, and managing director of Technochemi (Nigeria) Ltd, that the Mid-West government lost £5 million on the state's three largest industries, a cement factory, a glass factory and a textile factory, because of the inflation of prices to enable the Lagos-based firm to pay the 10-per-cent contract bribe to the ruling party in the state, the NCNC. (*Daily Times*, 12 January 1968.)

'modern' than the rulers in the hierarchical structure of the old North, but corrupt and, once in power, equally immune to pressures from below? Out of power, the young men, and the radicals and the minorities (NEPU and the United Middle Belt Congress) led rebellion against the hierarchical authoritarian order that enclosed them; out of power, they advocated an ideology of radical reforms. But radicals risen to office do not necessarily make radical governments; nor do they necessarily remain radical. Young men are taking the place of older men; but will they also not take over their policies? And where, as in some states in the North, there has been a reconciliation of new, formerly opposition men and the older conservatives, could this not be based more on the sharing of power than on any agreement over policy, in which the radicals have served to change ideas? Much is talked of the social change coming over the North. But Nigeria will not be the first country where new groups attaining political power do not implement significant reforms, but try rather to integrate themselves in an existing structure of power. When elitist politicians are 'in' and not 'out' of power, the preservation of the *status quo* becomes their goal. The new states, even in the midst of war, were preoccupied with very mundane considerations. Local sons, kept out of the civil service when it was the preserve of the Northern select, now expect to make up for lost time. The scramble for office, government houses and cars, promotion and service privileges, suffuses the swelling civil service, and the aspirants coming up behind from secondary school.

When the six new states were being set up in the North, a prime consideration was not policy-making, but the division of the old North's assets. To many civil servants, the most knotty problem was how to divide Kaduna's two Mercedes cars between six states. I asked an attorney-general from one of the new states what he considered to be his main challenge. 'Oh,' he said, pointing to the shelves behind him. 'There's the question of how we allocate the books in this law library.' Administrative costs are soaring beyond the capacity of treasuries, and budgets are being drafted with eyes on the expenditure but not on the revenue column. Oil, of course, is the great hope; and of

all the new interest groups that will use office to entrench themselves economically, the most tenacious will probably come from the 'oil rich Rivers State', as it proclaims itself in its publications. RS Gr (Rivers State Government I) reads the number-plate of the shiny black Mercedes Benz in the choked early morning traffic rush from Lagos's civil-service-elite suburb of Ikoyi to the complex of offices in the capital. On the back seat, beside a shiny new briefcase, and a smooth new hat, sits the new incumbent. The older political generation came to office the hard way, compared to this acquisition of power by civil service, army or navy\* promotion; but, however effortlessly acquired, the office, the prestige, the salary and the openings to economic power are no more readily surrendered.

Will a Nigeria of more, and smaller, states permit a stronger centre; or will the competition of local demands set up more centrifugal forces than the Federal centre can stand? Admittedly, small states will have less leverage on a centre than one previously subject to three powerful partners. But *in* place of the old monoliths from East, West and North, there could be small state parochialism in twelve different varieties and, given Nigeria's penchant for arrangements of expediency, a bewildering series of alliances at the centre. The constitutional experts are searching for forms of government to induce not inter-state conflict but cooperation. It is not so much the constitution that will determine this, however, as the system of revenue allocation for the states. And oil here is crucial, because conservative estimates put oil revenues at £600 million over the next four years, while the present Federal budget is under £rgo million a year.<sup>100</sup> A 1969 commission on revenue allocation proposed that all but ro per cent of in-shore oil royalties should be retained by the Federal government either for itself or for division among all states. But the oil-rich states would have nothing of this. The old derivation principle remains, under which 50 per cent of oil royalties go to the state of origin. State budgets already reflect

\*The military governor of the Rivers State, Lieutenant-Commander Diete-Spiff, is a twenty-six-year-old sailor who rose from meteorological officer to merchant seaman to naval cadet and then Lieutenant-Commander in the Nigerian navy.

imbalances between the states which could produce profound conflicts in the near future. The constitution of the new Federation posits the existence of a strong centre for Nigeria's unity and development; the disposition of oil- and other revenues – could set up centrifugal pressures that will make nonsense of the talk, and the war, for unity. Have not all Nigeria's previous crises been, essentially, over the distribution of the spoils?

Inside Biafra, mobilization for the war and paucity of information obscured the shape of internal politics. To some of its supporters, Biafra's cause was a revival of the possibility for African revolution : because Ibos are the basic revolutionary group in West Africa; and Biafra could have become the area's first viable state, pulling itself up by its own bootstraps, and the rest of the continent by its example.<sup>101</sup> The politicians of the Eastern region, however, were as much responsible for the failures of the First Republic as were any of the others; radical critics emerged, but they made no more of a mark in their own region than did their counterparts in the West. The test of Biafra's revolutionary potential had to lie not in its skill at entrepreneurship, nor even sufferings in war, terrible as these have been, but in the emergence there of some real alternative to the old system. The search for a social policy was begun even in the midst of war; but it is not known how representative was the group, Chinua Achebe included, that was 'putting down what it is we want and what we want to avoid, as a basis for discussion when the war is over'.<sup>102</sup> Nor is it known what concept of social change the group developed. Ojukwu's Ahiara Declaration, which came to be known as Biafra's little green book, stressed self-reliance in the main.

In Biafra, as in Nigeria, power lay with the military, and day-to-day government and policy-making was in the hands of the top civil servants. Like their politician colleagues, who *did* duty as diplomats for the most part, they were elitist in origin and in outlook. Ojukwu presided over a great pyramid of army and administration. But bricks in that pyramid did include some committees and institutions that hinted at changed concepts of mobilization and policy-making. There was, for instance, a

Political Orientation Committee, which ran an institution training cadres for the army; for the fronts of women, farmers, youth and trade-unionists, mobilized for the war effort; and for BOFF, the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters, which was intended not only to operate behind enemy lines rather than fight conventional warfare, but also as a counter to the power of the regular army and its coup-making propensity. A body known as the Socialist Group was the principal initiator, and its members were also represented on a National Guidance Council of young intellectuals planning, or talking about, the shape of the future. In Biafra, now dead, or in Nigeria, now administered and re-formed as one, any re-shaping of the future had to depend on the ability of Africans to carry through those structural transformations in their society without which no African country can really develop. Nigeria has been the classic example in Africa of the havoc caused by self-indulgent elites. And though these may have been somewhat obscured by the war, they will return to prominence, in new formations and new alliances, until groups emerge with a sustained critique of them, and a way out for the society itself.

Furthermore, Nigeria's problem now that the war has ended will be not *only* how to hold the country together, and govern it, but also how to get the army back into barracks and its maverick commanders under control. Eighteen months after the outbreak of war, the Nigerian army alone (not counting the Biafran forces, which it is virtually impossible to estimate) was ten times the size of what it was when Nzeogwu staged the first coup; in the third year of the war, it was said to have grown by at least half again. Large sections of the original officer corps were wiped out in coups and warfare; but prodigious intake and promotion have raised men from the rank of lieutenant to major in charge of a battalion within a year. Alongside a rise in rank goes a rise in pay, and status. Nigeria's lowest army rate (£17 SS. a month for a private) is about eight times the *per capita* income of the average Nigerian. Recruits have been drawn more heavily than ever from the traditional areas of army enlistment; but, above all, the unemployed and the formerly unemployable have found job outlets at last, and steady pay. When the army must

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be cut back,\* these men are unlikely to go willingly back to the street corner. Demobilization will bring problems enough. In 1967 the army was already taking soundings on how it might be phased back into barracks or civilian life. But during the war itself, the army was knee-deep in periodic breakdowns of discipline: some of which have been in the ranks and dealt with punitively, while others in the command have been too delicate to touch. When the instances of soldiers using their uniforms and their weapons to flout the law grew too numerous to ignore, Armed Forces Disciplinary Courts were established, which had nearly all the powers of a general court martial and could be convened at any time by the commanding officer of any unit.<sup>103</sup> Soldiers turned bank robber or hold-up man on the street or in the dance hall were dealt with by these courts. At the front, there were cases of major indiscipline and of large-scale desertions; as in 2 Division, where morale was weakened by its failure to take Onitsha in October 1967, despite repeated assaults across the river and very heavy losses. The unity of the Nigerian army and of Nigeria at war has been symbolized in the figure of General Gowon. His conciliatory style of leadership is an indication of how many pressures in army and administration – and, much less important for the time being, in politics – he has to reconcile. His tenure in office has not been without challenge. Throughout the first months of his government, he was a shaky occupant of the seat that Colonel Mohammed Murtala saw as his own, especially when the colonel lost out on the issue of immediately invading the East. Anti-Gowon moves were smothered several times after that. Throughout the civil war indeed, Gowon paid no visit to the front; and the commanders in the field held sway over their particular war kingdoms. There were three divisions, and each was virtually a law and an organization unto itself. Each drew its own budget; conducted its own arms purchases; handled its own recruiting in its own areas; and vied for allocations of men, arms and supplies from the centre. (Only in its final offensive did the three divisions

\* This was written before the war ended. When it had, both Gowon and Hassan Katsina made public statements to the effect that they intend keeping the army at very nearly its present level.

achieve enough coordination to win victory.) Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, conqueror of Port Harcourt and Calabar – megalomaniac, riotous, at times ebullient, at others berserk – was the hero of the war until he sustained a major defeat. **If** he was at last removed, it was not only because he had ceased to supply sufficient success, but because he had become too pushful at the game of requisitioning the best and largest share, and because he was taking too little trouble to conceal his political ambitions.

**If** there is a challenge to Gowan's leadership, it must come from within the army, or from politicians who have links with officers who, in turn, have support from the ranks. The army has been called Nigeria's thirteenth state. It is the country's most important constituency, and no serious contender for office can afford to forget this.

As daunting as were the problems produced by the war, the peace could produce issues almost equally intimidating. What is to stop soldiers, in the army, or recently demobilized, from taking steps inside the states to preserve and further their corporate interests? Heroes back from the front deserve a just peace. Can a post-war Nigeria give it to them? And if it does not, will soldiers not act to help themselves? The division of state assets will go on inside the states; at the centre, the battle for the distribution of resources has yet to be fought. The statisticians, the economists, the planners, the permanent secretaries of the ministries, the technical advisers – and, in the background, the international creditors, the bankers, the trading companies, and the condition of the world market – will circumscribe what is possible, perhaps desirable. The outcome will be decided in the contest between the echelons of power in post-war Nigeria; old interest groups and new; and, most belligerent of all, the army.

Conventionally, soldiers in peace-time should once again subordinate themselves to the civil authority. The army should retreat from state office; the soldiers should return to the barracks – though some commanders might leave the army to opt for politics – and the politicians should take over again. Nigeria's army has already shattered the fondest conventions about the military. The army was supposed to be a corporate body with a corporate sense; able, through discipline and train-

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ing, to avoid the ethnic or other group antagonisms that divided other elite groups. But Nigeria's army was no better able to escape these divisions and antagonisms; officers and other ranks alike broke discipline indiscriminately to identify with communal interests. Once the infection set in, it coursed through the army – a body so compact, so organized for the rapid communication of orders and action. A disciplined army is supposed to obey its officers. Nigeria, during the Congo operation, was said to have one of Africa's most disciplined armed forces. It did not take long for Nigeria to be talked about, however inaccurately in Congo terms.

Young officers are likely, it is said, to intervene in politics not through 'tribal feeling but through the impatience of the young and capable at incompetence and corruption'.<sup>104</sup> What was true for Nzeogwu and the young majors was not true of subsequent young officer actions. New military regimes have in general, it is said, put an end to disorders that have been tearing their countries apart. In Nigeria they tore the country apart even faster, and with sharper weapons. In Africa's new states, it has been said, the national goals of civilian policy-makers (the politicians), the bureaucracy and the army are substantially the same: stability and order, national unity and rapid modernization.<sup>105</sup> Politicians in Nigeria failed to reach these goals; bureaucracy and army failed even more abysmally.

The Nigerian army reflected within itself all the divisions, tensions, contradictions and crises of Nigerian society. The army was distinct only in possessing the instruments of violence. This made it possible for army men to topple an unproductive government, but not to govern productively in its place; to go to war but not to negotiate a peace. If the armed men of Africa's military governments have an ultimate achievement, it was this wretched war. The men under arms, when they were afflicted by crisis, resorted to the only weapons that they had been trained to use, and went into battle. Coup, counter-coup, civilian massacre and war: has there anywhere else been so rapid and gruesome a sequence ?

### 3. GHANA

#### Competitors in Conspiracy

Those who were directly involved in the overthrowing of Nkrumah have come to believe that God himself must have had a hand in the coup and that the armed forces and the police were merely instruments of God achieving his purposes for Ghana .

Major-General Kotoka, 22 April 1966

In Nigeria, where the coup failed, little was known about the coup-makers, and it was soon not politic to claim to know too much. Ghana's coup, by contrast, sprouted contesting claimants and several official and semi-official versions. Yet much about it remains obscure, and has been made even more so by the emergence, three weeks after the event, of an official version – the work of Police Chief John Harlley. This version was to justify the army-police balance of power in the new regime; to present the action of Ghana's service chiefs for the plaudits of the western world, so as to erase any hint of the rather squalid career considerations that prompted the principal actors; and to cover traces of the sharp in-fighting between army and police for the honours of the post-coup National Liberation Council.

Early on, claimants to the conspiracy had presented themselves with some alacrity. Every conspiratorial thought tended to be translated by the successful coup itself into a daring deed against the all-powerful tyrant; men who had whispered together in corners later seemed to imagine that they had been manning intelligence networks. For instance, the news of the coup had no sooner reached London than one Khow Daniel Amihiya announced, from two furnished rooms in the West Cromwell Road, that he was an ex-intelligence agent of Nkrumah who had been trained by the CIA as the coup's master mind. He had sent out the signal 'Locusts can be operated upon' to start the revolt; and the reply 'Cockerel cooked' announced its success.

# GHANA



London had been the centre of his network, which included France and Germany. Amihiya flew into Accra only to be publicly pilloried at an NLC-convened press conference. Standing on a table, with head bowed and hands behind his back while guards covered him with their guns, he renounced his claim and heard General Ankrah declare: 'None of us know him. We will put him in a cold ice chest.'<sup>1</sup> (General Ankrah himself had been pulled into the NLC at the eleventh hour and knew virtually nothing of its origins.)

In Lagos unnamed Ghanaian opposition circles in exile said that the coup had been organized by a group called the Ghana All-Forces Inner Council, set up five years earlier in the army and the police force. There had also been the London-based attempt of former Air Commodore De Graft Hayford, who had been relieved of his command after falling foul of Nkrumah, and who had hoped to draw on army trainees and even ex-servicemen in a plot to topple the president: these plans were still in the blueprint stage, however, timed, it was hoped, for action in September 1966. Then there was the Gbedemah-Busia axis: political opponents in Ghana, they had found common exile cause in scheming for Nkrumah's overthrow. Gbedemah nurtured contacts in the United States and Switzerland. Busia was often in the Ivory Coast, and is known to have had a meeting on at least one occasion with Jacques Foccart, de Gaulle's special intelligence and diplomatic operator in Africa; the French were very interested in getting rid of Nkrumah. But once again the plotting was vague and, without the serious help of foreign intelligence, its outcome was unlikely.

Though General Ankrah found it necessary to warn that the NLC would tolerate no false claimants, and would deal with them appropriately, these intrigues abroad were of marginal interest to an NLC trying to adjudicate a conflict within itself. For the first three weeks in the life of the new NLC were spent arbitrating the contesting claims to coup leadership of army and police. Thus, the first list of NLC membership carried seven names, four army men and three police officers.<sup>2</sup> A second and final list evened the score at four representatives of each force. (The eighth member was Hadley's deputy, A. K. Deku, whom

Harley subsequently credited as the man who had carried out the intelligence aspect of the planning.<sup>3</sup>) But it was only when Hadley produced a version of events that was to serve as a model for all subsequent accounts<sup>4</sup> that speculation about the police-army argument was quieted.

The N L Chad no sooner been constituted than there had been murmurs in the army, especially among the middle-ranking officers, that Kotoka should have been chairman rather than Ankrah; and that while it was the army that made the coup, with the police playing no more than a minor role, the police were now virtually running the Council. What, it was asked, was their claim to their disproportionate share of the power ?

The army version, to which Mrifa's account is faithful, was that the coup had been planned by a tiny, closed partnership of two: General Kotoka, then colonel; and his brigade major and staff officer in charge of training and operations, Major, later Colonel, and later still, Brigadier Afrifa. The plot was hatched early in February 1966 when, carrying out a reconnaissance of a training area for the brigade's annual manoeuvres, Kotoka and Mrifa found themselves alone on the road for over five hours, and together fulminated on the evils of the government. A few days after that conversation, confident of one another's complicity, they talked about Nkrumah's forthcoming visit to Hanoi, and agreed that a coup should be staged in his absence. The next morning, without wasting time, the colonel went to Accra to meet Mr Harley, the commissioner of police. The broad plan for the coup was drafted in Colonel Kotoka's office in Kumasi. 'So far as I knew the only person who knew the details of the plan was Mr Harley, whom I had not met at that point,' wrote Mrifa.s

For a while, a version was current that cast not only the army role as more central than that of the police, but Harley himself as a last-minute recruit. Members of Kotoka's defence platoon who moved down to the capital as the coup got under way, were detailed to call on senior army, navy, air force and police supporters to inform them of what was happening and to ask for their support.<sup>6</sup> In the capital they drove to police barracks and persuaded the commissioner of police to put the police behind

the coup.<sup>7</sup> To a reporter who asked about Hadley's role, Kotoka is reported to have replied, 'Hartley? Who's Hartley?'

The deciding factor in favour of the police claims was provided three weeks after the coup, when the government published *The Decisive Role of the Police*. This was the address delivered by Harley at Accra central police station to officers and men of the force. As he read the speech, Harley was flanked by his fellow-members of the NLC; it was an official NLC occasion, for the delivery of the official NLC version of the coup. It reversed the roles of army and police heads in the conspiracy, but justified the army-police balance of power in the new regime. It made the plot one of long-standing and careful coordination in which Harley himself had pride of place. Was it not, accordingly, natural that so seasoned an operator, who had conspired so long and earnestly but had yet defied discovery, should control the crucial security levers of the new regime? At the same time, the Harley version gave honoured roles in the planning and execution of the coup – as well as of several attempts that had failed along the way – to those who had to be given office in the NLC. This regime clearly had the political need to allocate roles rather as a Cabinet rewards good party and election campaigners. And so the character list of front-rank conspirators grew, to accommodate not only those who found a place in the NLC hierarchy, but also those whose political support was needed for the new regime, and those on Nkrumah's side (like former Foreign Minister Alex Quaison-Sackey and TUC chief Bentum) who crossed over. What the first Hadley version did not recount, subsequent versions, inspired by it, did.<sup>8</sup> Every time that a coup-maker held forth on the event, or an officially approved chronicler was given access to those in the know, still another instalment was added to the series of mutual compliments and credits that the coup-makers were dishing out to one another. After the first Harley version, and apart from the limited Afrifa account, there were no independent sources left to tap.

The most fetching aspect of the Harley version is his improvisation of a sedate if spurious justification for a professedly non-political policeman's resort to coup d'état. How could he

reasonably claim that he had the right, indeed the duty, to overturn the regime whose security he was pledged to protect? Hadley retorted that he had acted in his very capacity as policeman, mandated under an act of parliament to prevent crime, and to detect and apprehend offenders; for Nkrumah himself, head of state, was guilty of corrupt practice. This realization had come as a terrible shock to Hadley and to Deku. When Hadley dilated over this period to the Reverend Peter Barker, who interviewed some fifty coup participants for an NLC-approved if semi-official story of the coup, the NLC vice-chairman had an unconvincingly vivid memory for conversations several years old; and if he conveyed little else, it was a compelling portrait of himself, with his tortuous fantasy life of conspiracy. There was the occasion after the assassination attempt at Flagstaff House when he and Deku had chatted together in Ewe:

'... The real trouble is all this corruption in high places- and in Flagstaff House itself.'

'You don't mean that Nkrumah is implicated?'

'That's just what I do mean. I've got proof of it too. This ten per cent on all government contracts is not just private bribery by ministers; it's a systematic plan to finance the party. All the companies know they're expected to pay ten per cent in order to get contracts, so they just add it to their estimates and pay it out cheerfully.... No, I'm afraid we're fighting a losing battle. We're working loyally for the Old Man, trying to stamp out bribery and corruption, but the arch-criminal is the Old Man himself.'

Deku could hardly believe his ears. **It** was extremely dangerous for anyone to talk in this way: it meant that Hartley trusted him.

'As far as I can see,' went on Hartley, 'we have every constitutional right to apprehend him.'

Hartley lapsed into English to explain that the Ghana police, being in possession of information that the President was involved in criminal transactions, could prepare charges against him. 'A copy of the charges will be handed to the chief justice, the original will be delivered to Nkrumah, and we shall give him an ultimatum - a date and a time at which he must either abdicate or face the consequences.'

'And if he refuses to abdicate?'

'A military task force would be ready in positions surrounding Flagstaff House to effect his arrest. The Commissioner of Police would drive into Flagstaff House in an armoured car, together with

the Chief of Defence Staff, to declare Nkrumah destooled and take him away.<sup>10</sup>

Hartley, it seems, had reflected long and earnestly on section 36 of the act which empowered him to use force to apprehend an offender:

After giving careful thought to these matters I came to the conclusion that in view of the unconstitutional army which Kwame Nkrumah had raised around himself, the Constitutional Armed Forces of the country could be employed to constitute the necessary force as prescribed by the law to enable me to arrest criminals.

Thus was opened the constitutional way to mutiny by a head policeman, in league with the army. Hartley subsequently 'held discussions with certain members of the armed forces. *There was a general agreement to my proposals* [my emphasis] . . . we held secret meetings, and the plan of action was drawn.' Hartley apologized to senior police officers that they were not put in the picture until the very last minute. It had been necessary to keep strictly to the principle of the fewer the better.

Before the successful operation of February 1966, the plotters had toyed with some extraordinary schemes. There was the plan to chloroform Nkrumah one night when he visited one of his girl friends. Hartley had actually bought the bottle of chloroform it seems; but at the last minute he and Kotoka, then quartermaster-general in the Ministry of Defence, had dropped the plan one afternoon at a tennis party discussion.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion, Otu and Ankrah had been sounded out; each had agreed to act, but only if the other did. This was the plot due to be sprung in mid-1965, during the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, which Brigadier Hassan, Director of Military Intelligence, sniffed in the air. In the reshuffle following the enforced retirement of Ankrah and Otu, Kotoka was sent to Kumasi as commander of 2 Brigade. He had remarked, when the chloroform plot was dropped, that force had to be met with force; but then, as quartermaster-general, he had had no troops under his command. Now he had troops, although he was 170 miles from Accra.

With the exception of the mid-1965 plot, it is unlikely that there was much serious planning. There was intent, but it did

not make for the continuous thread of conspiracy or the intense commitment that Harlley recounted. Of his own extraordinary aptitude for conspiracy, there can be no doubt: when Nkrumah heard the first news of the coup d'etat while in Peking, his first reaction was: 'Oh, Harlley will put it down.' The skill with which Harlley gulled Nkrumah all those years could also serve to present an unlikely account of the coup.

It was an intricate and effusive account, certainly. It wove together several conflicting strands in the conspiracy of army, police and civilian elements; it made the coup-makers the country's true custodians of the rule of law. It did, however, omit at least one relevant factor. This was the strong rumour circulating in Accra, and since confirmed by Nkrumah,<sup>12</sup> that his first action on returning from the Hanoi mission would have been the arrest – whether at all justified or not is impossible to say without the evidence – of Harlley and with him Deku, on charges of diamond smuggling or complicity. If even the rumour reached the police chiefs, however, they clearly had no time to lose. Kotoka himself, it is generally agreed, felt insecure and nervous about how long he would last in command. Whatever else Kotoka and Harlley shared – and much has been made of their both being Ewe and quick to rely on one another – they were both uneasy about how long they would endure in their respective police and army command posts.

Wherever the coup plot originated, and whether it was Harlley or Kotoka who was its lynch-pin, it could not have worked without both police and army. What probably happened is that in both army and police force, Harlley and Kotoka – and with Kotoka, Mrifa – were thinking along parallel lines. Harlley was operating, for purposes not yet established, a private little security network. His access to official reports from the regions, which must in some measure have pointed to popular discontent with rising prices, must have been invaluable. But without the army, the police would have found no means of action. When the handful of men in the army decided to move, they realized that the plot would be abortive without the police, the larger force and the one in control of the extensive radio system. The approach was probably from Kotoka to Harlley, and not the

other way about;<sup>13</sup> but once a member of the inner circle of three, Harley became responsible for decisive planning and security on the police and administrative side.

The troops under General Kotoka's command were able to advance on Accra unquestioned and unsuspected because the police signals reporting their progress *en route* were sent ultimately to Harley himself, or Deku, for further action. The police communications network, which connects 126 administrative centres throughout Ghana, was crucial throughout the night of 23-4 February, and in the days immediately after the coup. Police headquarters in Accra became the operational headquarters of the NLC as soon as it was certain that the battle of Flagstaff House was won. It was the police force that administered the country for the crucial twenty-four hour<sup>14</sup> after the coup began. Above all, a synchronized police swoop on all the leading political supporters of the regime - ministers, MPs and top officials; youth, women and workers' brigade organizers - froze opposition even before it could be alerted. Harley and Deku planned this exercise together. As Kotoka's troops moved, ostensibly on a training operation, so Harley devised his own cover for the police swoop. The budget was due to be delivered in the week that Nkrumah left for Hanoi, and it was expected to be unpopular. Under pretext of preparations to counter any anti-government activity, police leave was cancelled and standby ordered. Every police station was alerted for trouble; every area intelligence officer was supplied with a list of top CPP officials and politicians, and was instructed to reconnoitre their addresses, ready for the time when they might have to be offered 'protection'. The security briefing was official and above-board. Harley and Deku worked on the lists of those who were to be 'protected'.<sup>14</sup> When the order was given, the security round-up worked only too smoothly.

What is significant is how few of the command in either service were drawn into the conspiracy. Harley, it has been seen already, had to apologize to his police officers for leaving them in the dark. As for the army, though all soldiers were cast as the heroic saviours of their country, only a handful were trusted at coup-making time and drawn into the preparations. Whatever

was said once the coup had been successful, the army command was not united for action to overthrow the Nkrumah regime. The 1965 plot, for instance, took Ankrah along with it; but Otu had balked, and, to Hartley's fury, could not be won over. After the coup, Major-General S. J. A. Otu found himself posted abroad as ambassador to India. The army's former chief of defence staff, Major-General Aferi, found himself his country's ambassador in Mexico; his support for the coup was strongly suspect by the NLC, largely because he had been picked by Nkrumah as successor to Otu. In fact, the coup came within a hairsbreadth of failing, just because it relied on such narrow army support.

Kotoka's consultation with Harlley on 15 February, after he and Afrifa had clinched their coup understanding, fixed the date for action eight days later. Nkrumah would be on his way to Hanoi. Kotoka and Afrifa drew in a very few other army officers. (Lieutenant-Colonel John Addy, garrison commander at Tamale, was told by Kotoka; and though he played no part in the action, he knew that the troop exercises in the north were to be used as a cover.) None of the battalion commanders was drawn in, since Kotoka took care not to move a complete battalion; he had with him his own defence platoon. When he moved it was with some 600 men in thirty-five vehicles, ostensibly testing their readiness for action against Rhodesia.

Only at the very last minute was it realized that, without the Accra-based 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade and their armoured cars, the coup-makers would certainly fail. Afrifa broached the coup plan to Major Coker-Appiah of the field regiment; and as Colonel A. K. Ocran, the brigade commander, had been a contemporary of his at an Eaton Hall officer training course, Kotoka himself approached Ocran.<sup>15</sup> But this was barely hours before the coup, when troops were already under their orders to move southwards. Ocran had little option, really. It would be hard to explain away the movement of the 600 men under Kotoka, Ocran reasoned to himself. 'We were committed.' At this stage Kotoka produced a sheet of paper of the general plan; it was quite simple: Kotoka's force would capture Flagstaff House, Broadcasting House and the Castle; while Ocran's force would handle the

President's Guard regiments, and seize the cable and wireless station, the news agency and the banks. In addition there were to be arrests of eight key men, among them Major-General Barwah, Colonel Hassan, Director of Military Intelligence, Lieutenant-Colonel M. Kuti, national organizer of the Workers' Brigade, and Colonel D. Zanlerigu, commander of the Guard regiment. The army chief-of-staff was listed among the eight, but Aferi was in Addis Ababa at the time. Kotoka detailed a special team to 'get' army commander Barwah.

The first half of the plan worked well enough. The battalion stationed in Tamale moved south on 23 February to join up with the remainder of the brigade in Kumasi. Striking time was 4 A.M. on 24 February, for the troop exercise was then to be changed into the coup operation. Mrifa was left in command of the column moving on Accra, while Kotoka – under the pretext of seeking medical attention – went on ahead to synchronize actions with Harley and with Ocran, and to install himself in a house near Flagstaff House. The convoy was already on the road when Colonel Ocran tried to call off the operation. Involved in a routine court-martial proceeding, he had been unable, in the hours since Kotoka had first approached him, to alert all his brigade commanders. He sent a flash to Kotoka, suggesting a postponement; but it was too late. At this point, Ocran set about trying to find his commanding officers. That evening, as they agreed to the coup, Ocran devised a pretext for the operation of the troops: they were to suppress a mutiny by the Guard regiment. 'I knew this would go down very well,' Ocran said.

That night Kotoka and Ocran met briefly to finalize the plan of operations. Their combined forces were to join up at 3.30. But a few hours after Ocran returned to Burma camp, he received a battery of telephone calls, all connected with the impending operation, although the telephone should, according to the plan, have been disconnected by the Signals regiment. One of the calls was from General Barwab, who had received a report that Colonel Hassan of Military Intelligence had been arrested. Ocran promised to investigate; but it was already evident that Major Coker-Appiah's squadron had jumped the gun and carried out some of its arrest assignments prematurely.

Ten minutes later the platoon sent by Kotoka to deal with Barwah arrived, and when the army commander resisted arrest, shot him. He died in the Signals regiment room a few minutes after being taken there. The troops that dynamited their way into the house of Colonel Zanlerigu, the commander of the Presidential Guard, found that he was not there; he reached Flagstaff House in time to alert its defenders. The premature arrests also alerted some of Nkrumah's ministers, among them Kofi Baako, Minister of Civil Defence, who improvised a quick meeting – in the foyer of the Ambassador Hotel – of the Presidential Commission, or those members of it who could be found at that hour. Its sole act seems to have been to alert Commodore Hansen of the navy and Air Commodore Otu, both of whom went to the operations room in the Ministry of Defence to try and rally the army.

Kotoka's final briefing of his troops had taken place punctually, and they had moved off on their assignments. Under Major Mrifa, 'A' Company made for Broadcast House, to seize the radio. 'B' Company, under Captain Sesshie, went into action at Flagstaff House, but considerably below strength: one of its platoons had been held up by a breakdown on the road; and the major part of the attacking force, 2 Brigade and the armoured cars under Ocran's command, did not materialize. The battle for Flagstaff House was still in the balance when at 6 A.M. Kotoka made his broadcast announcing a seizure of power. An hour later he set up combined headquarters with the police at police headquarters. Both Harlley and Kotoka agreed to decline the office of head of state, and to offer it instead to General Ankrah. The general heard of the take-over only when it was in operation. He was used, in Latin American style, as the coup swing man: as highest-ranking army officer, he swung behind the NLC the support of the senior officers not taken into the confidence of the coup-makers.

The countryside police round-up was effectively concluded within hours of the start of the operation. But at Flagstaff House, 2 Brigade and the armoured cars had still not arrived to reinforce Captain Sesshie's troops, who were facing heavy fire, and there was a danger that the battalion of the P O G R in the

Shai hills thirty-two miles away would arrive to reinforce Colonel Zanlerigu's men. The Shai hills battalion made no move. This, apparently, was the work of Lieutenant-Colonel Addy, Tamale garrison commander, who was one of the few trusted by Kotoka, and who had fortuitously been called to Accra for the same court martial on which Ocran had been sitting. He had made use of this assignment to call on an old army friend, Major Tetteh, commanding officer of the Shai hills battalion. 'He was very careful about his approach. He said nothing about a coup. He treated it as a casual social call. . . . He sympathized with Tetteh over the delay in his promotion. . . . "Well, old man," he said, as if it were an afterthought, "if ever anything were to happen – you know what I mean – don't move your troops. That's my advice." 16

Colonel Ocran's 2 Brigade did not move either until the battle was almost over. The colonel had been summoned to the operations room by the navy and air force chiefs, and he subsequently explained the half-heartedness with which he conducted himself by the military proprieties imposed by the army chain of command. Air Marshal Otu and Commodore Hansen were his seniors, and he was obliged to place himself under their direct command. Indeed, he took orders to counter the coup, but then played for time to negate them. The burlesque in the operations room lasted some hours.<sup>17</sup> Even after the Kotoka broadcast, Ocran remained cautiously mute about his knowledge of the coup; at one point there was a serious risk that contradictory sets of orders would set his own men in combat against each other. One of his orders given under pressure resulted in the engineers being blockaded in their own barracks for a while. Then a chance summons to two battalion commanders, who had been party to the coup planning of the night before, brought an end to the farce. Ocran gave them one set of instructions in the operations room and then accompanied them to whisper instructions for the arrest of the air force and navy commanders. When these two were carried off at gun point, Ocran went along with them, to give the impression that he, too, was under arrest. Only then, three hours late for his coup assignment, did he confide his knowledge of the coup and, leaving the two commanders

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in the guard-room, hurry away to try and catch up. He had taken no chances on the coup going the wrong way; and his self-confessed irresolution was apparently shared by other officers in his brigade.

By mid-morning, the reinforcements of 2 Brigade had been rushed up, and the Guard regiment at Flagstaff House had surrendered; by the end of the day, the main wall of Flagstaff House had been breached by an armoured car, and the compound occupied. Broadcasts called on civil servants to remain at their posts. The membership of the National Liberation Committee, with the setting up of the Economic Committee of the NLC, was announced. The army promotions were rapid. By noon of coup day, Major-General Ankrah had become lieutenant-general. That week, Mrifa rose from major to colonel; Ocran, from colonel to brigadier; Kotoka, from colonel to major-general.

## **Swing to the West**

In the eyes of western diplomacy the change that has come over the political aspect of West Africa in the past six months looks encouraging. . . . Now a solid block of states under the control of moderate leaders stretches from the Congo to the frontier of Guinea.

A special correspondent, writing in *The Times*, 30 April 1966

Were the Western powers accomplices in the Ghana coup; and, if so, how? For the time being, the dossier of calculated external intervention, or collusion, must remain open. More evidence is needed before one can say with any degree of the certainty expressed by Nkrumah,<sup>18</sup> how direct a part Western powers, intelligence agencies, financial and trading interests played. At the least, they created a climate in which prospective coup-makers were never in any doubt that a move against Nkrumah would be greeted with fervent approbation in the West. As it was, the day after the coup d'etat, *The Times* of London recognized that 'Ghana would be worth salvaging again'.<sup>19</sup> Ghana had 'swung back to reliance on the West'.

For two reasons, no particularly deep international conspiracy was needed. In the first place, if the conspiracy was not orchestrated, it found a natural harmony between those inside Ghana and those outside who called a tune different from the one that the Nkrumah government was trying, however fitfully, to play. In the second place, like all Third World countries caught between falling prices for primary exports and the climbing costs of industrial imports, Ghana was inescapably susceptible to external pressures.

When the cocoa price fell, by coincidence or contrivance, Ghana's economy slumped with it. When reserves grew short and Ghana resorted to stiff short-term suppliers' credits, it was held ruthlessly to ransom by foreign firms and foreign governments. If Ghana's own vision of the consequences was blurred, the same could not possibly be said of the hard-sell countries eager to boost their own export earnings at the expense of their poorer customers. Even when it was apparent that Ghana could not finance all the debts that it was accumulating, Western countries – like Britain, with its Export Credits Guarantee Department – eager to improve their sales abroad, continued to guarantee private firms that advanced credits for project costs. The Drevisi Group of West Germany, probably Ghana's largest single creditor, alone advanced £60 million in credits.<sup>20</sup> Ghana, noted one observer, 'has been sold a massive shipyard (how Ghana can provide credits to finance the sale of ships is a mystery) by a contractor from one of the several countries where the shipbuilding industry is notably "depressed". Perhaps this is one explanation for the contract?'<sup>21</sup>\* (The country was Britain.) The lasting availability of supplier credits, the same observer commented, was 'primarily a function of domestic export promotion efforts in the creditor countries'. Some reputable Western firms are alleged to have used 'the high pressure techniques of an encyclopaedia salesman on a suburban doorstep',

\*By 1965 the external debt for suppliers' credits was about £437.4 million, 82.5 per cent of the total debt (Ann Seidman). Of Ghana's debts, 77 per cent were due to be paid between 1963-8, because the typical loans negotiated were medium-term export guarantee credits, especially the borrowings from Britain and West Germany: *West Africa*, 9 Apr:il 1966.

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in the way capital projects were hawked round to under-developed countries.<sup>22</sup>

Then there was the role of agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, supposed to be disinterested mechanisms of international aid and cooperation. Intrinsically, and because of their dependence on United States finance, however, such bodies are preoccupied with the needs and the policies – political where not economic – of the creditor. The Fund and the Bank were concerned with 'stability', not development; orthodoxy, not change. Deserving societies were those that conformed, not those that tried to innovate. Aid policies have been shown<sup>23</sup> to have a bias against radical policies in developing countries. How much greater the sanctions – even if they were not so called – against developing countries whose foreign policy pronouncements were in jagged conflict with those of the principal creditors? A country that could or would not produce a 'climate of confidence' – foreign and pan-African policy included – for foreign investment and aid could scarcely expect the subvention of capital from those whose interests it hurt.\* **If** Ghana was a miscreant society subscribing, by proclamation at least and by deeds where it could, to a different order of development priorities, it could not hope for understanding, let alone generosity. And the profligacy of the Nkrumah regime did provide a pretext for a combination of economic, diplomatic and strategic pressures against his government.

For Ghana, 1965 was the year of the squeeze. There had been mounting pressure in Washington for less indulgent attitudes to Ghana, especially after Brezhnev's visit to Nkrumah and their

\*Recall, for instance, the 18 June 1964 Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate:

SECRETARY RUSK: .- . we have made it very clear to Mr Nkrumah that we can't proceed with any confidence in this matter [of the aluminium project] if he is going to steer Ghana down a road that is hostile to the United States or American interests there.

SENATOR LAUSCHE: Has Russia sent in any aid?

RUSK: Russia is sending in some aid to Ghana.

LAUSCHE: **If** you would supply a statement, a recitation of the facts on Ghana, I think it would be very helpful in the record.

RUSK: **If** I could speak just off the record for a moment.

*(Discussion off the record)*

joint communique. President John Kennedy had been an active supporter of the Volta Dam project, financed by Kaiser; but with the Johnson administration came a hardening of United States economic and political policies towards Nkrumah. 'In its relationship to Africa as a whole,' the United States War Book said,<sup>24</sup> 'Ghana has limited strategic importance. It is doubtful that West Africa, in whole or in part, could become the scene of major operations in the event of a Third World War. There is little of strategic value in the area that would make it a target for conquest.' But by 1965, American attitudes had changed.<sup>25</sup> The first arrival of Soviet arms in Ghana during the Congo's post-independence crisis had caused alarm: were the weapons destined for Gizenga in the Congo? The alarm subsided, but it flared again in 1965. On 8 June 1965, the United Nations man in Accra noted in his report<sup>26</sup> to the UN secretary-general that, in the presence of Major-General Barwah and Major-General Gorshenin, the Russian military attache, 142 cases of machine-guns had been loaded into the Russian freighter *Gulbeni* at Tema, for dispatch to Pointe Noire and suspected re-routing to Stanleyville in the Congo. Moreover, Nkrumah was building a £6.8 million air base in North Ghana with a three-mile long landing strip, thought by the Americans to offer 'excellent facilities for Soviet planes *en route* to Havana. In Guinea it had been the identical threat of staging facilities for Soviet planes bound for Cuba that had precipitated feverish activity by United States ambassador Attwood.<sup>27</sup> 'Ghana despite its own economic crisis was a more valuable prize for the East than Guinea had appeared to be five years earlier,' it was thought.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Nkrumah was developing intelligence facilities with Soviet and East German help. Nkrumah, it came to be considered in Washington, 'could now threaten the *status quo* in Africa: he could undermine regimes friendly to America, and to the Congolese he could transmit substantial aid... The intelligence facilities which Russians and East Germans were developing with the Bureau of African Affairs were bound to complicate American efforts throughout Africa... By mid 1965 concrete American interests began to be affected.' Thus, Willard Scott Thompson discloses, 'it is not a surprise to learn that during

1965, according to one report, Nkrumah's intentions were the subject of discussion at the highest NATO level'.<sup>29</sup>

It was in 1965 that Nkrumah made a major request for assistance to the Western powers. He was said to be seeking a loan of £1,000 million. He was referred in turn to each capital of the IMF. He also applied for surplus PL 480 food from the United States to help meet Ghana's shortages, and made the 'dual mandate' speech at the opening of the Volta River project\*. The United States, however, had embarked on a consistently antagonistic line: investment and credit guarantees were withheld from potential investors; pressure was brought to bear on existing major furnishers of credit to the Ghana economy; and applications made by Ghana to US-dominated financial institutions, like the IMF, the World Bank, and direct to the US (US AID), were turned down.<sup>30</sup>

As could have been guessed, the Americans were calculating carefully what might be the odds for a coup. The shrewd American deputy chief of mission in Ghana and his equally able successor played their hands very skilfully. Influential Ghanaians were in fact pleading with them that no new assistance be extended to Nkrumah lest (depending on the speaker's viewpoint) it delay the inevitable confrontation with economic reality and extend the life of the regime itself.<sup>31</sup>

In September 1965 a World Bank evaluation mission visited Ghana as part of the government's attempt to get financial assistance. The IMF had sent a mission to Ghana in May of the same year. The conditions laid down were predictable. Ghana's economic programme under the Seven Year Plan should be fundamentally repatterned. State-owned and run corporations should be closed down (not reorganized), and transferred to private enterprise. There would be a liberalizing of policy towards foreign private investment. There should be a scaling down of social amenities and 'unproductive' expenditure under the development plan, and heavier personal taxation. When Ghana tried to renegotiate its loans from West Germany, it was informed that the latter was waiting for the results of the World Bank mission, and in particular was considering Ghana's bi-

\* Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism* was published just at that time.

lateral and barter agreements *with* 'centrally planned' or socialist economies. (The one IMF condition to which Ghana did accede was the cut in the cocoa price paid to producers; this was announced two days before the coup.)

Ghana next had resort to the socialist states. The Amoako-Atta mission of late 1965, described earlier, was crucial. The CPP Cabinet, though, was said to be divided between this solution of extended links with the *socialist* states, and the IMF demands. In the West, especially Britain, the prospect that socialist states would invade traditional trading preserves like cocoa, minerals and timber, was alarming. (On 12 January 1966, a report of the Cocoa Marketing Board revealed that the United States was the leading purchaser of Ghana's cocoa, accounting for 124,050 of the 567,769 tons exported. Other major purchasers were West Germany, the Soviet Union, Netherlands, Britain and Yugoslavia. However, agreements signed with the *Soviet* Union in December 1965, contracting for the sale of 150,000 tons of cocoa there, indicated a basic shift in the direction of Ghana's commercial relations.)<sup>32</sup>

Britain had begun to feel that neither its investments (about £850 million strong) nor its trade were safe. The turning point in British attitudes, it has been said,<sup>33</sup> was the departure of Sir Geoffrey de Freitas, who had served as High Commissioner for two years. 'By the time he left there was general agreement that Britain could only mark time till a new regime appeared.' Britain had been hopeful that the new Investment Act introduced in 1963 would provide a partnership of British capital with Ghanaian enterprise under the Seven Year Plan. But Nkrumah assigned the attractive slots in the plan to the state sector, and bought out private investors whose success was threatening . . . by the end of the year, this, and the corrupt system of import licensing, led British commercial interests to consider the Investment Act a dead letter. In the diplomatic field, Ghana was taking Britain to task in the Security Council for its Rhodesia policy, and meanwhile Ghanaian activity at the OAU summit had helped 'narrow Wilson's alternatives'. After the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Britain and Ghana over Rhodesia, 'most of the British officials, regardless of what

happened in Rhodesia, thought they would not be back while Nkrumah was still in power'.<sup>34</sup>

Both the United States and Britain – and West Germany, which had been alarmed by a series of articles attacking it in *Spark* at the end of 1965 and the beginning of 1966<sup>35</sup> – were preoccupied with the matter of how to get rid of Nkrumah. But they faced real problems in finding someone to displace him.

Ghana's army, cheered on by the middle classes, proved capable coup-makers; but even if the political and economic interests of the West had not been indispensable in the making of the coup, they were crucial in helping to sustain it. Coups, Edward Luttwak has written,<sup>36</sup> are in the nature of things illegal; how justify and legitimize them? Recognition by foreign powers is essential.

For many countries of the Third World whose *pays reel* lies outside their own borders, it will be a crucial problem. When much of the available disposable funds come from foreign loans, investments or grants, and when foreign cadres carry out a vital administrative, technical and sometimes even military function, the maintenance of good relations with the particular 'donor' country or countries concerned may well be a determining factor in political survival after the coup.

Recognition, he points out, is generally granted to illegitimate governments after a polite interval, if there are convincing assurances that they will continue with the traditional pattern of foreign relations. Ghana, of course, was expected to *reverse* Nkrumah's pattern of international relations; and this was promptly done. Technicians and experts from socialist states were sent packing, though there was later a public admission that the expulsion of Russian technicians had affected the fishing industry,<sup>37</sup> the Cuban embassy was shut down; a clutch of policy statements made all the agreeable noises. 'Far more important than these declarations is the considerable diplomatic activity which will take place after the coup (and sometimes even before it),' Luttwak adds. 'After the necessary exchange of information and assurances the new government will usually be recognized. . . . Diplomatic recognition is one of the elements in the general process of establishing the authority of the new government;

until this is achieved, we will have to rely on the brittle instruments of physical coercion, and our position will be vulnerable to many threats -including that of coup d'etat.'

When it came to diplomatic activity immediately after the coup, the schedule of the French ambassador to Ghana was especially revealing, as he went into quick conclave with representatives of the former French colonies on Ghana's borders. Relations between France and Ghana were sour, as were Ghanaian relations with the Ivory Coast, Togo, Upper Volta and Niger. One of the first rounds in the NLC's intensive diplomatic activity was to clinch new relationships with these immediate neighbours.

The British were disconcerted by the coup. Its political direction suited them perfectly, but they were not expecting it to happen when it did. 'It seems clear from the British reaction to the military take-overs in Nigeria and Ghana - Wilson's instruction to George Wigg to "shake up" the intelligence services - that the appropriate sections in the British embassies in Lagos and Accra were tailing badly behind events or failing to evaluate correctly the information at their disposal,' wrote Roger Murray.<sup>38</sup> When it came to diplomatic recognition, Britain had a problem. Nothing, it was felt in Whitehall, would be clumsier than if a number of 'white states in the group categorized neo-colonial by Nkrumah' were seen to be giving Ghana 'a possessive bear hug or a paternal pat on the head'.<sup>39</sup> It was deemed wiser to wait until a number of African states had taken a decision, so that governments in Europe and other continents should not appear to be trying to influence the course of events in Africa by pressure from outside. Kenya and Tanzania had, after all, walked out of the OAU conference in Addis Ababa in protest against the seating of the Ankras government delegation; and the United Arab Republic; Mali and Tanzania announced their support for Nkrumah. Britain announced its recognition of the new Ghana government on 5 March. By then a number of African countries had done so: Liberia, Nigeria, Tunisia, the Ivory Coast, Malagasy, Togo, Gambia, Niger and Senegal. After the recognition by Britain, the NLC restored the diplomatic relations which had been severed over Rhodesia.

The first European power to recognize the NLC government was West Germany. Among the Western powers, West Germany's relief was said<sup>40</sup> to be the greatest when the coup succeeded. West Germany had grown convinced that its position was being weakened by the growth in trade between East Germany and Ghana.

Diplomatic recognition was followed by the phase of gift-giving. The NLC begging bowls were held out, and all charity was received with obsequious gratitude. West Germany sent a batch of sixteen pairs of spectacles (additional pairs followed at various times) for some of the released detainees. Britain shipped out a £7,000 consignment of pharmaceutical drugs. Powdered milk was flown in from the United States for distribution to released detainees, and NLC members went personally to receive it at the airport. US food consignments under the PL 480 agreement, which had been refused Nkrumah, were authorized in March, less than a month after the coup, and bags of yellow corn arrived at Tema harbour. An astute US gift – after appeals to Britain had gone unheard, and had provoked NLC expressions of disappointment that Ghana's old ally was lagging in generosity – was equipment and supplies for the army; the heroes were seen in the green gabardine and baseball-type caps of the US forces, until more traditional supplies were located. The American presence was very visible at Accra in generously staffed embassy and US AID offices; in an expanded military mission which paid close attention to developments inside the Ghanaian army; in 'academic' and business probes.<sup>41</sup> US AID offered to supply a US army 'crash programme designer' among other things.<sup>42</sup>

Economic sluices, previously closed, suddenly opened again. Commercial credit that had dried up gushed anew. British businessmen with Ghanaian interests were fluent in their praise of the change. Major-General Sir Edward Spears – who happened to be chairman of the Ashanti Goldfield Corporation – headed a British mission to Ghana and pleaded with the West, especially Britain and the United States, to help the NLC: "They are carrying too heavy a weight. They are very devoted people who need help."<sup>43</sup> By the sixth week after the coup, West

Germany had negotiated a new twenty-year loan, half of which would be used to finance the purchase of essential commodities from West Germany.\* Seven weeks after the army-police takeover, the price of cocoa began to rise on the world market. By the end of 1968 it was four times higher than it had been in mid-1965.t (The price paid to Ghana's farmers went up, too.) The British government loan to the Volta project had been a tied loan, with interest, and Nkrumah had been unable to have its terms amended; after the coup, the loan was converted into an interest-free, untied loan.

Ghana had done all the right things. General Ankrah announced that the Seven Year Plan was abandoned, and that 'no private enterprise would be forced to accept government participation'.44 NLC vice-chairman Hadley went on several tours of West Germany; and during one of these, he invited the Krupp group to take part in development projects, discussed the training of Ghana policemen in Germany, and the building of ships for the Volta lake. International Confederation of Trade Union advisers were rapidly on the spot to help Ghana's trade-union movement, and West Germany's Friedrich-Ebert Foundation seconded one of their staff to the Ghana TUC.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were in close and solicitous attendance. No sooner was Nkrumah toppled than the IMF gave immediate aid totalling almost

\*In December 1966 a technical and economic cooperation agreement was concluded between Ghana and Germany, and in the summer of 1967 Germany made available a credit of 75 million marks for the purchase of urgent commodities, plus infrastructure projects.

†The movements of the cocoa price in the months immediately before and after the Ghana coup d'état are interesting, though not as significant as some might suspect. For most of 1964 the price per cwt dropped dramatically, reaching 170s. by July, and then beginning to slowly rise in the second half of 1965 and the first months of 1966, as follows:

December	1965	170s.
January	1966	180s.
February	1966	177s.
March	1966	184s.
April	1966	178s.

The price continued to rise and fall somewhat during the rest of 1966 and 1967, but by the end of 1968 had risen astronomically to 480s. by the end of that year, then declining somewhat in 1969 to 420s. or thereabouts.

£20 million in standby facilities and other drawings. By the end of 1968 Ghana had received over \$100 million from the IMF, of which nearly \$85 million were obtained after April 1966, in support of the 'stabilization' programme pursued by the NLC. From July 1966 the Fund stationed a resident representative in the country to advise the government on monetary, fiscal and balance of payments policies. An IMF fiscal team was also in attendance to advise an overall review of tax structure and policy. In the three years after the coup, the IMF's views were crucial in influencing creditor countries to accept a postponement of Ghana's debt repayment obligations. The Fund convened and chaired the meetings at which the representatives of the major aid-giving countries and international bodies were present; it was the first time in the Fund's history that it had convened such meetings. The austere conditions imposed by the IMF – like the drastic reduction of government spending in the July 1966 budget – were accepted by the NLC without demur; in return the IMF and the creditor nations staggered debt repayment terms.

Ghana was back in the fold. 'The soldier-policeman government has greatly impressed the International Monetary Fund,' wrote Russell Warren Howe.<sup>45</sup> 'The probability is that Ghana in the next year or so will be a shining example of democracy. It must avoid the danger of presenting an image of chaos and irresolution which would make investors hesitate. . . .' Mr Julian Amery of Britain's Conservative Party pointed out that Ghana was the only country apart from Indonesia where 'a pro-Soviet regime had been overthrown and replaced by one friendly to the West. . . . Ghana is surely one of the countries where, within her limited means, Britain should reinforce success.'<sup>46</sup>

The effects of the coup d'etat were threefold. First, it took Ghana back to the political position of several decades earlier and installed in power – or used for political ballast – those whom Nkrumah and the CPP had beaten at the polls; thus the social groups which had expected to inherit office after the colonial withdrawal finally did so, with the help of the police and the army. Secondly, the coup put the running of Ghana into the hands of technocrats: army men, but above all civil servants who

saw Ghana's economic problems and all crises of underdevelopment in terms of technical 'efficiency'. This in practice constituted an unquestioning deference to the patterns laid down by outside creditors, economic interests and their 'experts'. Finally, between them these forces of conservative politics, technocracy and foreign capital inaugurated a rapid process of dismantling all attempts, whether failing or successful, to introduce state-owned or socialist aspects into the economy. Private enterprise was embraced like a long-lost lover. No penance was too extreme for a Ghana that had forsaken it. Everything that Nkrumah had tried was denounced and damned: anything that outside powers or foreign capital proposed was gospel. It followed automatically that in the rearrangement of the economy and the political order, the generation and the social forces that had put the CPP into office were to be penalized.

Post-Nkrumah Ghana, wrote Irving G. Markowitz<sup>47</sup> 'was an outstanding example of "technocracy-capitalism", a political prototype that is of newly increasing significance, particularly in the aftermath of the various recent world-wide military coups d'etat'. In their search for a social base in Ghana the technocrats aligned with the members of the liberal professions and commercial elites. Ghana's new policy-makers were mostly products either of Sandhurst and Camberley, Hendon Police College, or of Harvard, the London School of Economics, Cambridge and other British or American universities. All but one of the members of the NLC were army or police force careerists who had risen through the ranks, beginning as privates or police constables; none of the officers had received a university education, but they immediately called on those, especially in the civil service, who had. Straight after the coup, at the army's request, the principal secretaries took sole charge of the ministries and the provincial administrations. On their own volition, eight of the most prominent members of the civil service had early issued a statement in support of the new regime.<sup>48</sup> Headed by Emmanuel Omaboe, who had been Nkrumah's chief economic tactician of the NLC, the Ghanaian civil service showed its rubbery, malleable shape. The bureaucrats exhibited a resilience

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and endurance under two antagonistic regimes which the politicians could never hope to equal, for the civil service on which the NLC fell back was left virtually unscathed by the post-coup probes and shuffles of office. Chiefs and judges were an exception; many elevated by Nkrumah were in large measure deposed or replaced by the NLC. For them and for the leading CPP politicians, the see-saw tipped the other way up.

From the day that the NLC took power, Omaboe with advisers took the country's major economic decisions. He was appointed chairman of the National Economic Committee, composed of seven civil servants and bank officials, ranging in age from thirty-five to forty-one,\* who brought all their pragmatic skill into prompt, even precipitate, action to reassure Ghana's creditors. The nine regions of Ghana were headed by military or police officers in conjunction with regional administrative officers. Administrative patterns reverted to bygone colonial days, as in Accra old colonial precedents were thumbed through when instructions for local officials had to be formulated. Once again the chieftaincy system came to be talked about with especial reverence. Chieftaincy, said Harley, is an essential element in Ghana's national life.<sup>49</sup> It began to look as though the 'natural' rulers, whom even the colonial system had begun to dispense with in self-government formulae, would be called on to fill the political vacuum.

Only in June, in their fourth month of office, did the eight members of the NLC divide ministerial responsibility among themselves.<sup>50</sup> The following month the NLC appointed a Political Committee of twenty-three members. The body was virtually a *Who's Who* of the old NLM and United Party, the opposition to Nkrumah which had been trounced at the polls a decade earlier. These men, said General Anluah in answer to

"Other members of Omaboe's economic team included Mr Albert Adamako, the governor of the Bank of Ghana, a barrister and graduate of Cambridge; Mr Kwaku Gyasi-Twum, a product of King's College, Durham, principal secretary in the Ministry of Finance at one time; Mr Kew Arkaah, a graduate of Harvard, a senior Mobil executive before he joined the civil service; and another Harvard product, Mr B. K. Mensah, who studied at the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank. (Biographical details from *West Africa*, 1:2 March 1967, pp. 287-8, 'Ghana's Rescue Team'.)

criticism, had been chosen 'because they are men who have the right sort of experience to sound out the people'.<sup>51</sup> Chairman of the Political Committee was Mr Justice Akufo-Addo, a former Supreme Court judge. Its members included Dr Kofi Busia, formerly leader-in-exile of the opposition, and all the well-known names from the yester-year of United Party politics: R. R. Amponsah, Joseph Appiah, William *Ofori* Atta, S. D. Dombo of the former Northern Peoples' Party, which had gone into opposition to the CPP in the North, and Modesto K. Apaloo. No member of the Political Committee had formerly been associated with the CPP except for TUC secretary-general B. A. Bentum, who crossed the floor theatrically, and J. A. Braimah, who had been an early member of the CPP Cabinet but who had been involved in a matter of corruption, had resigned from the CPP and become a significant figure in the opposition. When the political Committee was enlarged towards the end of the year, its additional members included the managing director of Lever Bros in Ghana. (Two of the young technocrats of the Economic Committee were former executives of Mobil and the United Africa Company. Prominent businessmen were also appointed to the board of directors of the Ghana National Trading Corporation, and of the State Hotels Corporation.)

While the Economic and Political Committees worked supposedly side by side, the Political Committee was being rapidly disillusioned to discover that the decisions taken by the Economic Committee prejudged, or rendered unworkable, some of their own guidelines. Policy was in fact steered by one man, Emmanuel Omaboe, who was the country's principal representative in talks with Ghana's creditors, and whose decisions on the re-scheduling of debt payments – before Ghana had the opportunity to consider whether these were wise in the long term – conditioned most other significant issues of policy.

The old UP leadership was not well pleased at the retention in office of prominent civil servants. Government by civil servants, complained aspirant politicians, was government by an anonymous body, by the faceless; and under this form of government there was no opportunity for the redress of

grievance.<sup>52</sup> The civil servants, no less than judges and academics, had been corrupt or CPP flunkies, they complained, and their record under the Nkrumah regime should be investigated. It was this pressure, with the counter-coup led by Lieutenant Arthur Iri April 1967 (which was abortive, but which resulted in the death of General Kotoka), and the advice of Mr Adu, the Commonwealth Secretary, that led to a change in July 1967. The principal secretaries in charge of the ministries were displaced by civilian commissioners; and an Executive Council was created from the seven remaining members of the NLC (the vacancy left by Kotoka's death was not filled), together with the civilian commissioners. In Nigeria it had been the conflict in Biafra that had led to the inclusion of civilians in government; in Ghana it was mainly the crisis caused by the abortive coup. Most of the commissioners were relatively young technocrats, from the generation of the elite that came after the United Party.<sup>53</sup> In his speech of appointment, General Ankrah referred to them as 'private gentlemen'.<sup>54</sup> The NLC also created the National Advisory Committee of thirty-one members, which replaced the Political Committee and which included the fourteen newly appointed commissioners and the members of the Political Committee.<sup>55</sup> The politicians were steadily getting further through the door. When finally it was opened to them, it was for a view of politics that, once again as in the old colonial days, were the 'virtually exclusive preoccupation of various personalities and internal factions among the new governing elites',<sup>56</sup> who were committed to the orthodox economic policies prompted by foreign advisers.

Hotfoot to Ghana in the year of the coup, to advise on restructuring of the economy, came a team of economists from Harvard University. Known as the Development Advisory Service of the Center for International Affairs, it was under the direction of Dr Gustave F. Papanek, who had done similar duty in post-coup Indonesia. (Harvard had been involved in similar advisory capacities in Iran and several Latin American countries.) The United States was delighted with the turn of events in Ghana, wrote Papanek. 'I was anxious to provide strong support for the new government.'<sup>57</sup> Several of the Papanek

confidential reports were 'liberated' in 1969, during a student raid on Harvard University Hall; and xeroxed copies were 'deposited by an unknown person' at the office of *The Old Mole* in Boston, Massachusetts, to be published subsequently in a special supplement. These revealed that some people inside and outside the Harvard advisory group had regarded as unfortunate the group's heavy engagement in the preparation of Ghana's post-coup two-year plan; but Papanek reminded them that this 'provided an excellent device to get the advisers into the major problems of the economy, and to give them access to people, documents and ideas that will be invaluable to them later on'. Since the IMF Resident Representative, 'who has gained a unique position in Ghana', was moving on (this during 1965), the Harvard Group would be in an excellent position to move actively into work on crucial, immediate problems of the Ghanaian economy. 'The government,' he observed in his first report, written on 13 December 1966, 'is remarkably receptive to foreign advisers.' It was, after all, such an interesting set of problems: 'an economy that had gone far towards collectivisation and centralization and which is now reversing the process to some extent'.<sup>9</sup>

The Papanek reports should be allowed their full say on several issues. On Ghana's debts, which 'increased her vulnerability to foreign pressure', and their rescheduling:

At the time of Nkrumah's overthrow it might have been possible to repudiate, or at least to scale down, many of the more doubtful debts. The Government decided against this course, partly out of a sense of responsibility and obligation ('a gentleman does not waltz on debt') and partly under strong pressure from the creditors. *Some countries threatened to cut off all aid and all export credit guarantees if the debt were not fully honoured.* Since Ghana had no foreign exchange reserves and imported on short term credit, the failure to guarantee this credit might have meant interruption in imports, perhaps for six months [my emphasis].<sup>6°</sup>

Negotiations with the creditors proved exceedingly tough, Papanek showed:

The US, delighted with the turn of events in Ghana, was anxious to provide strong support to the new government, but since it is an

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insignificant creditor, it played a relatively modest role in these discussions. Of the major creditors the Dutch have proved flexible, but both the Germans and the British were tough and intransigent, arguing that they did not want to create a *dangerous precedent for negotiations with the Indonesians, the Indians, the Turks and others* [my emphasis].<sup>61</sup>

By 1968 Ghana faced the need for another round of debt re-negotiation, hardly a year after the previous round.

Ghana's negotiation position was a difficult one, given the foreign exchange problems of its principal creditor, the UK; the predatory instincts of the second largest creditor, a private contractor named Drevici; and the tough position taken by such leading creditors as Germany and Japan, usually represented by their banking and not their foreign policy or foreign aid fraternity. The outcome will depend in part on the credibility of the implied Ghanaian threat to hand the deadlocked negotiations to a politically elected civilian government or to declare its inability to meet all of its debts on schedule. The Ghanaians are in a better position than in the past to use the latter threat, since Ghana has established its good faith servicing its debts since Nkrumah's overthrow and since its foreign exchange position is somewhat better than at the time of the coup . . . Ghana's position would be further strengthened if it could count on some support from the US, the IMF and the IBRD, but the position of all three has been equivocal. The US has a strong interest in favorable debt re-negotiations, especially since US aid on a net basis goes essentially to pay off Ghana's old debts to its US and European creditors and it has urged the creditors to be cooperative and sensible. Its position, however, has been voiced very softly. *Directly and indirectly, through its influence in the IMF and IBRD, the US has concentrated not on pressing the creditors, but Ghana, urging it not to use the implied threat of default.* The US has therefore weakened the credibility of the major bargaining threat which Ghana holds. . . . The IMF has played a similar role, urging the creditors to be cooperative and sensible, but has been unwilling to set the example by stretching out its own debt. The IBRD has been of minor importance in these discussions. *All three (international bodies) point to their statutory requirements not to provide support to countries that default on loans* [my emphasis]."

By the second half of 1968, the Papanek reports were warning: Ghana will become a net exporter of capital to the developed countries. This incongruous situation would exist despite substantial net aid

from the United States. . . . *In other words, Ghana would be a supplier of capital to the UK and some European countries* [my emphasis].<sup>3</sup>

Omaboe was himself having second thoughts by 1967, when the second round of IMF-convened meetings of creditors took place. 'It should be recognized that our economy cannot perpetually be run at the mercy of external balance of payments support,' he said.<sup>64</sup>

When in the middle of 1966 the NLC's first budget was placed before the country, it was the recipe that the IMF had long sought to prescribe for Ghana, full of a strong dose of orthodox classical economics. Government expenditure was to be financed only from revenue available, and the private sector was to be the mainspring of the country's progress.\* General Ankrah told the country that the NLC rejected 'any purely theoretical division between the public and private sectors'<sup>65</sup> and was concerned only with the 'best' use of resources. Four major sectors of the economy would be recognized: private; joint private and government; government; and the cooperative. Open to both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians to assume an increasingly larger share, the private sector would remain the largest both by numbers of persons engaged and by gross output. Active state participation was to be limited to certain basic and key projects. No private enterprise would be forced to accept government participation. To attract foreign capital, tax exemptions were offered for three years, and tax relief for up to ten years, while the repatriation of profits and capital was guaranteed. As for the state-owned and run projects, they were to be turned over to private ownership as rapidly as possible.

The Papanek reports reveal that the NLC had received conflicting advice on the state enterprises and the state farms.<sup>56</sup> (By 1966 there were fifty state-owned and twelve joint state-private enterprises in Ghana.) The initial inclination was simply to sell

"See Kportufe Agama's review of the budget, *Legou Observer*, 30 August 1966: 'The Budget leaves much, far too much, to the private sector. . . . Thus we have the prospect of the economy's growth, and the welfare of Ghanaians . . . placed largely in the hands of those who appear unlikely to act with the enthusiasm which the needs of the country require . . .' It was a budget which 'left too much to chance'.

off the state enterprises to foreign companies. But there were second thoughts; although 'the American Ambassador still seems to be pushing for that solution, which I consider completely unrealistic'.<sup>67</sup> Professor Arthur Lewis had pointed out that selling most of the enterprises to foreign companies could be politically disastrous. A UN advisory team, headed by an Egyptian, recommended that the government retain most of the enterprises and place them under highly centralized management. The government wavered. Decisions on a set of policies towards the public sector constituted 'clearly one of the major challenges that still face the government'. Papanek's own view was that the sale of a number of state enterprises 'should provide an excellent opportunity to develop a group of Ghanaian industrial entrepreneurs'.<sup>68</sup> This is the road that Ghana took.

Many of the state enterprises had been poorly conceived, badly sited and hit by shortages of raw materials in the import control chaos. Some had operated at heavy losses because they had been overburdened with unskilled and unqualified personnel. But while some had been steady liabilities to the state, others had shown promising profits, and some looked<sup>69</sup> as though the worst years were over, and they would soon begin to make profits. None of this was of any account to the NLC. The more profitable the enterprise, the keener the NLC appeared to sell it to private enterprise. The state bakery corporation had made a profit, and was one of the first enterprises to be sold to private buyers. The state laundry corporation had made a profit over five years and was 'much in demand'; it was sold to private capital. The paints corporation at Tema was doing well and was reported to be a highly profitable venture; the NLC decided that private investors should be invited to participate. The tyre-making factory was sold out to private enterprise, as was the Sekondi boat-building industry. Among the bidders were Firestone, Associated Portland Cement, Norway Cement Export and Cine of France. Several virtual hand-overs to foreign companies – the Abbott-Ghana agreement over the pharmaceutical factory, which was cancelled when the scandalous terms became known; the handing over of Accra's two largest hotels to Intercontinental Hotels Corporation, USA; the deals with Anglo-

American finance over 200,000 acres on the Accra plains; and, finally, the take-over of the Ashanti Gold Mines by Lonrho – caused storms of protest that the NLC was disposing of Ghanaian national assets with total disregard for the consequences to the economy.<sup>70</sup>

Initially, in shifting over to great reliance on the major private sector, the Papanek reports disclosed, 'it appeared that foreign businessmen would be the major beneficiaries. To correct this dangerous political consequence, the government opted for Ghanaization.'<sup>71</sup> This had several aspects. A back-dated decree was promulgated for the promotion of Ghanaian business enterprises at the expense of 'foreigners', mainly Lebanese and Syrians, in small-scale undertakings. Small businesses, taxi services or workshops with staffs of fewer than thirty had a period of five years in which to train Ghanaians, and three years within which to ensure that half their capital was sold to Ghanaians. Certain reserve industries with annual retail sales of a prescribed sum had to have Ghanaian staffs by 1970.<sup>72</sup> To assist Ghanaians to enter into joint ventures with foreign investors, it was decided that the benefits of the Capital Investment Act would only be given to enterprises where a certain amount of the capital was owned by Ghanaians.<sup>73</sup> The Bank of Ghana launched schemes to help indigenous businessmen with domestic credit insurance, and a special fund was launched, with the assistance of the US PL 480, to boost these entrepreneurs.<sup>74</sup> The budget provided tax relief for enterprises wholly owned by Ghanaians. West Germany loaned an expert to the National Investment Bank of Ghana, which was primarily concerned with promoting small and medium-sized industries.<sup>75</sup> The policy was to kick into being an indigenous ownership class and commercial bourgeoisie to take their place alongside the technocrats and professionals as the mainstay of a conservative political system and a dependent economy. With the commanding heights of the Ghanaian economy in the hands of either foreign companies or a propertied, respectable middle class, the country could be considered 'safe' for the West.

Nowhere perhaps as much as in the post-coup schemes for the handling of Ghana's cocoa crop did the rapture for private

enterprise so blatantly turn the clock of the economy back. One of the NLC's numerous commissions of inquiry<sup>76</sup> was instructed to investigate the local purchasing of cocoa. Under the CPP government, the United Ghana Farmers' Cooperative Council (UGFCC) had been the sole licensed buying agent for the Cocoa Marketing Board. The Commission heard farmers' objections to the UGFCC: some on the grounds that politics was mixed with business (the UGFCC was said to favour CPP-supporting farmers); others on the irregularities committed by UGFCC employees in the weighing, handling and purchasing of the crop at buying stations. Yet the Commission was emphatic that the UGFCC had achieved its main objective of moving the nation's increasing cocoa crop from the rural areas to the ports for shipment to overseas markets; that the quality of the cocoa had improved from 1961-6; and that 90 per cent of the cocoa bought up-country was grade one quality, 'an excellent performance by any standard'.<sup>77</sup> However, the farmers who appeared before the Commission were insistent that this system of cocoa handling be demolished; and to this the Commission and the NLC acceded. There followed the astonishing spectacle of the Ghana government inviting back into the field expatriate firms like Cadburys, SCOA, CFAO, the UAC and others which had handled the trade in the 1950s, and encountering refusal. Cadbury Brothers declared: 'We think it would be a retrograde step if expatriate organizations were to become licensed buying agents of the Cocoa Marketing Board on the same basis and relationship as existed formerly.'<sup>78</sup> CFAO replied that it believed 'more efficiency could be achieved at a lesser cost, through monopoly buying by a properly organized and controlled national organization'.<sup>79</sup> Since the expatriate firms were clearly not interested in entering a field that they had left a decade earlier, the Cocoa Marketing Board decided to license as agent any Ghanaian who could finance and handle the purchase of a minimum tonnage of cocoa annually. The field was thrown wide open for the cocoa farmers themselves to become cocoa-brokers and -like the commercial bourgeoisie that was being so assiduously nurtured - to amass capital for entrepreneurship. It was, after all, a government very solicitous

towards the cocoa producers, who received two increases in the price paid for cocoa during the NLC's first two years of office. The cocoa fanners and emergent businessmen were to be an important political basis of the new Ghana.

The entry of the army into government not only rearranged the political constituents of power, but also spread the distribution of benefits very differently. The better-off were generally the favoured. The exemption limit of taxable income was raised. The CPP tax on property was abolished, as was the tax paid by cocoa fanners on income from the sale of cocoa. On the other hand, the NLC instituted a charge for school textbooks, while government hospitals and clinics levied charges for drugs and dressings. (To all except civil servants, which prompted an irate letter to the press: 'Did the armed forces fight to liberate civil servants alone?')<sup>81</sup> Devaluation, ordered by the IMF, had lowered salaries; but a commission into the public service subsequently recommended increased scales of remuneration for all government employees.<sup>82</sup> At the other end of the scale, the shutting down of several state enterprises and the retrenchment of the Workers' Brigade created a large force of unemployed. The NLC retrenched 63,000 workers in under two years, the great majority of them (all except 9,000) from the public sector, and most of them construction workers and labourers.<sup>83</sup> The CPP era had set afoot, though it had failed to consolidate, a social and economic revolution in the creation of jobs and opportunity beyond the exclusive ranks of the educated and the propertied. The NLC set out to build a social and economic base of the 'respectable', the propertied and the 'stable' elements of elite society. The early constitutional proposals framed by the committee under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice, Mr Edward Akufo-Addo, produced an electoral system heavily weighted against the age and social generation that had been Nkrumah's strongest supporters. It set the age limit for the vote at twenty-five, in a country where the age group fifteen to twenty-five is larger than any other; it gave extraordinary powers to a president who had to be at least fifty years old; it severely limited the powers of Parliament, and made the judiciary ubiquitous in sensitive executive areas. It was to be

government by gerontocracy, the critics taunted. Power was to be allocated to the so-called natural estates of the realm, an ageing and conservative president, the judges and the chiefs; but there was 'an acute contradiction between this distribution of power in political society'<sup>84</sup> and a Ghana numerically dominated by school-leavers and the unemployed, junior civil servants, school teachers and young clerks, and the poor of the rural areas. During the protracted debate on the constitution, there were signs that the NLC itself was divided on the issue of the promised return to civilian rule. General Ankrah seemed in no hurry to relinquish office; seemed, indeed, to be developing political ambitions. On the other hand, Colonel Afrifa, close to Ashanti political aspirations and Dr Busia in particular, was known to have stormed out of NLC proceedings more than once in protest against the slow staging of the return to politics. When the NLC suddenly brought forward the date for the lifting of the ban on political parties, this was said to be not unconnected with signs that Colonel Afrifa had been renewing contacts with the company commanders of his old battalion, the 5th at Tamale. Prolonged tenure of government was not cementing, but chipping away NLC and army solidarity. There had been a nasty scare only fourteen months after the NLC installed itself, when two junior officers, commanding no more than 120 men, had almost seized power. This was the abortive coup d'etat led by Lieutenant Arthur in April 1967.

#### THE COUNTER-COUP THAT FAILED

During the first months of 1967 prominent Ghanaians were receiving cyclostyled sheets from the League of Young Army Officers, alleging corruption in the NLC, denouncing the record of the new rulers, and demanding a change. The League's members, and any direct connexion with CPP forces within or outside Ghana, were never identified. But certainly inside the army there was a simmering resentment at the police share of NLC power; and, inside the junior officer corps, indignation at the uneven rewards doled out to army men after the 1966 coup. The Nigeria army officers who staged a coup had not promoted themselves, it was said; those in Ghana responsible for 24

February should have been given medals for meritorious service, but not promotion.

In the officers' mess of B squadron of the Reconnaissance regiment based at Ho in Eastern Ghana, feeling rose high one evening, when an officer sent from headquarters to umpire exercises described how army promotion examinations were made especially tough so that those on the top would remain there. There was some talk about the number of colonels in the Ghanaian army. 'I said six,' said young Lieutenant Arthur, 'but Colonel Odonkor, the officer from headquarters, said, "There are twelve full colonels in the army." They counted, and got exactly twelve names.' Odonkor added, 'You can see that the top is very very heavy. These people are selfish, all of them.' Second Lieutenant Collison added: 'I think they just add the pip if they feel like it.' From that day on, twenty-six-year-old Lieutenant Sam Arthur told subsequent court hearings, 'I began to develop a hatred for all senior officers, especially the colonels and above.' NLC members, mess talk said, were feathering their nests and had renounced the aims for which 24 February had been staged.

On 4 April Lieutenant Arthur learned that he had failed his promotion examination. Six days later, he found himself in temporary command of the garrison. The idea of staging a coup came to him as he occupied the commanding officer's chair.' As soon as I breathed the air of importance . . . the first thing which came into my mind was to see if it would be possible to stage a coup with the resources I had.' He had read about the attempt in the Sudan by a second lieutenant; he would be the first lieutenant in Africa to lead a coup. He laid his plans in less than a week. As alternative to government by the NLC, he considered a chief justice, the chancellor of the university and some senior civil servants; then he decided that there were not enough honest civilians in the country. The alternative was a new military junta. 'I counted out all colonels and above, because I knew in the coup I would eliminate them.' One officer was excluded because he was too womanish; another, because his mode of speaking did not befit a head of state. Three candidates were chosen although they were not, apparently, told; and they

strenuously – and two of the three, successfully – denied complicity when arrested. They were Lieutenant-Colonel Assassie of the Ghana Parachute battalion, Major S. M. Asante of the Infantry and Major R. A. Achaab, commander of the Reece squadron in Accra. (The latter was court-martialled and jailed.) Lieutenant Arthur had to strike before 21 April because on that day the permanent garrison commander was due to arrive from Reconnaissance headquarters to take his place. On the night of 6 April 1967, he took advantage of an operation in search of armed smugglers near the Togo border to re-route his squadron to Accra. He detailed Lieutenant Moses Yeboah to capture Flagstaff House, and arrest General Kotoka; he sent a sergeant to seize the radio station, and another to the airport; and he detailed Second Lieutenant Oseo Palm to take the Castle and General Ankrah. He claimed an instruction from the commander of the Armoured Reconnaissance squadron, Major Achaab, to enlist the detachment in a coup being organized by the Ghana army. When the unit reached the capital in light armoured cars, it split into four contingents and proceeded to stage a take-over according to the Afrifa-Kotoka pattern of the previous year. Two hours after the start of the operation, Lieutenant Arthur broadcast the displacement of the NLC by the three-officer junta he had chosen. General Ankrah narrowly escaped from the Castle which, after two hours, was virtually abandoned to the coup-makers. General Kotoka was fatally shot in the attack on Flagstaff House. No member of the NLC or the army command emerged to rally forces for a counter-attack; loyal forces seemed to have faded into nothing. Though the firing at the Castle started some time before the attack on Flagstaff House, no warning was sounded and no general alert ordered. When the coup finally petered out in mid-morning, it was not from any counter-attack by government forces, but from the deficiencies of the coup-makers themselves. The Ho units began to run out of ammunition, and Lieutenant Arthur, trying to win over senior officers in Burma camp, found himself tricked or talked out of his bid for control at a strange conference of the coup-makers and the Accra commander. Only then did troops arrive to arrest the mutineers.<sup>85</sup>

A military tribunal, assembled with the utmost dispatch, heard Lieutenant Arthur insist that he was the sole architect of the coup. He had divulged its aim to his two young collaborators, Yeboah and Poku, only when they were already on the road to Accra, he insisted, He was convinced that the NLC members had organized the February 1966 coup for their own selfish ends, and were amassing wealth and betraying the aims they had declared.

He singled out the promotion of Brigadier Afrifa. 'Who knows we shall soon have field marshals in Ghana?' he asked. He criticized the NLC for the promotion of semi-literates as chairmen of regional administrative committees. He regarded the NLC as an illegal government, which was not constitutionally elected by the people. The only difference between his own coup attempt and the 24 February revolution was that his had failed, while the February one had succeeded, Arthur told the court. If his coup had been successful, the same people who had hailed the 24 February coup would have hailed him, too. 'A coup becomes legal when it succeeds, but when it fails it becomes unlawful.' Arthur and Yeboah, who had shot General Kotoka, were sentenced to death, and Poku to thirty years' imprisonment. The NLC ordered a public execution, and a crowd of some 20,000 – with children among them – surged round the Teshie firing range to watch this edifying spectacle of revenge.

How had so small a force almost taken Accra? And what explained the inadequacy of the NLC security apparatus, or the army paralysis during the attack itself? Reports of restlessness brewing at Ho – and at Tamale in the north where Afrifa, who happened to be on the spot, took prompt control during the scare of the counter-coup – seemed to have been lodged with military intelligence, but there discounted. Some said it was sheer bungling; others murmured dark hints of favouritism. Whatever the cause, the Reece squadron managed to travel from Ho to Accra without being detected by military intelligence. (After the Arthur attempt, gates were erected on the roads leading to Accra.) More serious still, when the alert was sounded – Ankrah had apparently managed to telephone from the Castle at an early stage of the firing there- there was no reaction from the army.

(One leading member of the command was said to have spent the dangerous hours in a wardrobe, another in a latrine.) Perhaps the NLC considered itself so popular that it had not bothered about security. But whatever the reason, it was a signal failure. Some heads had to roll. Those responsible for negligence and inefficiency would be removed, Hadley announced. Shortly afterwards, the army commander, Major-General C. C. Bruce, and the navy commander, Rear-Admiral D. A. Hansen, were appointed defence advisers to Ghana's missions in Washington and London respectively. They were transferred without detailed inquiry into their actions, or those of others, during the counter-coup, apparently in a fury on the part of General Ankrah that his fellow-Ga officers had shown such an absence of zeal in quelling a mutiny of which he would have been the principal victim. In the following months, disciplinary action was meted out to young officers and Ncos. Seven officers and close to 200 men were placed in custody. Some court martials ensued, but the procedures left a bitter taste in the military mouth. The privates were discharged from the army and the NCOs jailed, some with heavy sentences. Several officers were individually disciplined, some were sentenced to imprisonment and discharged with disgrace from the armed forces. Others were not given hearings but were simply reduced in rank. The punitive action was haphazard, and rumour was rife that those who got off lightly must have enjoyed protection in high places. **If** some sort of rough army justice was being done, it was not seen to be justice; and if the abortive coup was prompted by a sense of injury felt by young officers at the hands of the high and mighty command, its aftermath inflamed the injury even more.

The counter-coup and the slap-happy punitive actions in its train illuminated the essential dilemma of an army that has come to power through a coup d'etat. When would reward flow from the usurpation of power by army officers; and when punishment? Arthur put his finger on the issue during his court martial: a coup becomes legal when it succeeds; but when it fails it is unlawful. Yet how was the soldier to know whether to obey the order of an officer? This was the dilemma before Corporal Joseph Roland Donkor, who spent the hours of the counter-coup

hiding from his company engaged in taking Broadcast House. On the one hand, it was a dereliction of duty for any soldier not to obey his commanding officer; on the other hand, 'I never know if the order is right or wrong,' he pleaded at the court martial of nine NCOs from the disbanded Ho Reece squadron. The prosecution insisted that any order to capture or kill the head of government and commander-in-chief of the army had to be illegal. But the memory of the NLC's rise to power was far too fresh for that to be conclusive. The solution was for a soldier to query the order of the officer with the counter 'Who says so, and why?' But the beginnings of army scepticism meant the end of army discipline, not to say morale; and the entire army knew that. What rapport was left between officers and men, or between senior and junior officers, after the 1966 events, and the grumbles about self-promotion, slumped sharply after 1967; and the army was left pondering the very opposite rewards possible for those who seize government.

It remained for Ank:rah to cite yet another consequence of the 1967 events. Rumours had reached armed force headquarters, he said, that the insurrection led by Arthur had been planned by Ashantis and Fantis against the Gas and the Ewes. This was a 'wicked rumour which was absolutely untrue'. The armed forces were a cross-section of all tribes in Ghana. It so happened that the three officers killed in the counter-coup were all Ewe. That was true enough; yet only one year after the NLC had installed itself, there was a growing tendency to put a tribal complexion on most events, and the Arthur coup was no exception.

The feeling in the army that promotion and punishment were not impartial, but precipitate and partisan, also spread to the command. Bruce and Hansen had been removed, but others who could equally have been held responsible for army security lapses were conspicuously left untouched. When Bruce and Hansen were posted to their missions abroad, two of Ghana's three defence chiefs had been displaced. In December 1968 it was the turn of Air Marshal Michael Otu. He was suddenly dismissed from his command, detained and accused of plotting the overthrow of the NLC and the return of Nkrumah. Accused

with him was his aide, Naval Lieutenant Kwapong. Otu was charged with having met an executive member of the London branch of the CPP while on a visit to Britain in December 1966; and the seizure of two Russian fishing trawlers in Ghana's territorial waters some months earlier was linked with the Otu plot. Hartley chose to make the allegations against Otu and Kwapong at a press conference; consequently, when the Amisshah Commission was appointed to inquire into the charges, Otu and Kwapong refused to answer questions, give evidence or cross-examine witnesses unless they were granted public trial. The commission carried on intermittently; but by October 1969 Otu and Kwapong had been reinstated in the armed forces.

Not long after Otu's removal, General Ankrah himself was ignominiously forced to resign his post as head of government. He left the Castle to the boos of servants and bystanders. He was replaced by Colonel, promoted Brigadier, Mrifa. General Ankrah, it emerged, had accepted sums from foreign businessmen for distribution to politicians, presumably so that they could organize a party around him which would further his presidential chances, largely built on Ga support. And, ironically, by the time that Ankrah came under fire in the NLC, he had himself helped remove his own support in the army, in the shape of Bruce and Hansen. Next came the dismissal from the NLC of yet another Ankrah supporter, the commissioner of police, Mr John Nunoo. It emerged that Nunoo, a Ga like Ankrah, and connected with moves to form a Ga-based political movement, felt that Ankrah's dismissal was intended, and served, to handicap the Ga people in the political stakes then opening. Nunoo charged Victor Owusu, former attorney-general but also a prominent Ashanti politician, with using the Ankrah dismissal to destroy the public image of his political opponents. Politics was barely launched – it was some weeks after the Ankrah and Nunoo dismissals that the ban on parties was lifted, and the elections were still a long time off – but NLC tendencies, despite the oft-repeated army avowals of neutrality, were already finding their place in civilian politics.

Increasingly in 1968 and 1969, both army and politics looked

like polarizing along tribal or communal lines : something which even the most fervent critics of Nkrumah agree that he had banished from Ghana. Afrifa in the army and Busia of the old United Party shared Ashanti political aspirations. Harlley and Deku were close to Gbedemah and his fellow-Ewe politicians and business associates; and their political ambitions were strongly represented in the army command by a core of Ewe officers, well positioned at defence headquarters, in 1 Brigade and the navy.

NLC developments and the rising prominence of Ewe officers in the command should not have been significant in themselves. But as politics and parties began to be legalized after May 1969, there was a fumbling paucity of policies and programmes; and with firm purpose absent, regional and local claims and alignments were likely to colour politics. There was a final crisis inside the army. Decree 345, published on 28 April 1969, permitted the revival of parties but disqualified several categories of people—in addition to the 152 disqualified from public office by a decree of February 1969—from being founding members of a party or holding office in it. These included all who, at any time on or after July 1960, had been members of the CPP central committee or part of its top-level government and party apparatus. The decree disqualified Komla Gbedemah, the leading Ewe politician, and subsequently leader of the opposition in Ghana's new Parliament. Two days later Decree 347 displaced the earlier 345. It stated that only those who had held office on the eve of the coup d'etat of 24 February 1966 were disqualified. Gbedemah was free to form a party and to campaign for office. Behind this *volte-face* lay a threat from a portion of the army, led by Ewe officers in Burma camp, to march on the NLC if it did not rapidly reverse the policy that excluded Gbedemah. The first decree had been signed by Afrifa alone; a subsequent decision of the NLC laid down that all decrees had to be the joint decision of all the members, and signed by them all. What army amity had existed was being exhausted by the claims of political competition in the country.

There were thus strong army reasons behind Ghana's return to civilian rule. On 30 September 1969 the NLC repealed the

proclamation which had brought it into being; and at a handing-over-of-power ceremony on 1 October, Ghana returned to civilian rule. In the elections contested by five parties, the Progress Party led by Dr Busia, the successor in spirit of the old United Gold Coast Convention, had swept the board. Gbedemah's National Alliance of Liberals had triumphed in the Ewe areas, had been totally eclipsed in the Ashanti and other Akan-speaking areas, and formed the official opposition. The manifestos of the two parties had covered much the same ground in much the same way. There was a constitutional innovation in the shape of the Presidential Commission, which vested three members of the NLC with combined powers: Afrifa, Hadley and Major-General Ocran. Only Ocran retained his service post; Afrifa decided that he would not return to the army, and Harley resigned his police appointment for the Presidential Commission.

The coup d'état of 1966 and the elections of 1969 had thus reversed the earlier election results of the independence years: but the army in Ghana, uniquely in Africa, had stepped down from the office it had seized, to make way for a constituent assembly, a Cabinet and all the accompanying procedures. There were perhaps two principal reasons. First, the army – and the army command and its advisers knew this well – was neither cohesive nor united: continuance in office between the pulls of regions, and politicians, and generations, seemed likely to tear the army itself apart. Secondly, Ghana's elitist politicians, denied once their heritage of office by Nkrumah and the CPP, were not going to let it happen again. Unlike Nigeria, these were politicians whose reputations had not been soiled in office or compromised by failure in government. They came to power with a fairly clean sheet, though to many it was too clean of programme and policy perspective to augur much in the way of solutions to Ghana's economic and political problems.

It was as though the African pre-independence days were starting all over again in Ghana. It was a plunge back to the political style of old-school politicians, resonant with the rhetoric of democracy and handsome in the trappings of Westminster. The intervening years in Africa had shown that such was only the shadow, not the substance, of what new but still

dependent governments needed. One of Nkrumah's failures was that he did not succeed in keeping the tough, corrupt and de-manding group intent on property and acquisition out of leading positions in the CPP and government; in Ghana today it is open season for this group, and for overseas private capital, only too interested in making use of this further chance. Nkrumah's government might have been a case of socialism badly manque; but its successor regime, far from restoring the health of a dependent economy, has delivered it to the system responsible for the poverty and exploitation of all the Third World.