

COMPASS

COMMUNIST LEAGUE

(Journal of the Communist League)

No. 87; August 1990

THE CIVIL WAR IN LIBERIA

LIBERIA, on the west coast of Africa, has an area of 43,000 square miles (about the size of Iceland) and a population of 2.4 million. It was founded in 1847 by American philanthropic organisations as a colony for liberated black slaves from the United States.

Liberia's two main exports are iron ore (which accounts for 70% of export earnings) and rubber — mainly from the vast US-owned 'Firestone' plantations. According to the late President of Liberia, William Tubman,

" . . . most people were earning as little as £38 a year"
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 18; p. 25,052).

Liberia's capital, Monrovia (population 425,000) is named after James Monroe (1758-1831), the fifth President of the United States. Liberia's unit of currency is the US dollar. Although American-Liberians comprise only 5% of the population, they have dominated Liberian politics since the foundation of the country in consequence of the country's dependence on United States imperialism.

VIRTUALLY FROM ITS FOUNDATION TO THE PRESENT DAY, LIBERIA HAS BEEN A SEMI-COLONY OF UNITED STATES IMPERIALISM. American interests in the country include

" . . . a 'Voice of America' transmitter . . . ; a telecommunications relay station . . . ; an Omega satellite station; private investment amounting to some \$350 million and extensive outstanding bank loans".
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 28; p. 31,283).

"Liberia was dependent on the USA for one-third of its budgetary needs".
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 32; p. 34,147).

"Access rights to Monrovia's port and airport give to the US its only reliable gateway into West Africa and a staging area for supplies to anti-Soviet forces in Angola".
('Time', 6 August 1990; p. 27).

In 1971 William Tubman, who had been President since 1944 as leader of the 'True Whig Party' (which had ruled Liberia since 1870), died, and was succeeded by William Tolbert, previously Vice-President,

" . . . a prosperous Liberian coffee and rice grower"
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 26; p. 30,405).

Unlike Tubman, however, Tolbert came to stand for

" . . . closer links with the Soviet Union, a vision of cooperation with

the states of the region . . . and a tendency to believe in the rhetoric of the Organisation of African Unity".
('Financial Times', 1 August 1990; p. 4).

SUCH A FOREIGN POLICY WAS, OF COURSE, UNACCEPTABLE TO LIBERIA'S MASTERS IN WASHINGTON, WHO INSTRUCTED THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TO MAKE ALL PLANS FOR TOLBERT'S REMOVAL.

The 'People's Redemption Council' Coup

In April 1979 large-scale demonstrations broke out in Monrovia over a proposed increase in price of rice. According to official figures, 41 persons were killed and 548 injured when police fired on demonstrators. Damage was estimated at \$40-49 million. Congress granted Tolbert emergency powers for a year and the university -- described by Tolbert as

" . . . a breeding-ground for revolutionary and subversive ideas"
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 25; p. 29,732).

-- was closed down.

By this time Liberia's foreign indebtedness

" . . . was estimated . . . at about \$800-million".
('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 28; p. 31,282).

In April 1980 it was judged that the time was opportune to put the CIA plans into motion. A military coup, carried out by a 'People's Redemption Council' composed of junior army officers, seized the presidential mansion assassinated Tolbert and his Ministers, and proclaimed the coup leader -- Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe -- President. Doe

" . . . had recently received training from a United States military mission in Monrovia".

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 26; p. 30,405).

The new regime suspended the Constitution, proclaimed martial law and banned all political parties.

Liberia's Increased Dependence

Following the coup United States 'aid' to Liberia was increased.

Between April and December 1980 the US government sent four missions to Liberia.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 28; p. 31,283).

"Since the overthrow of President William Tolbert in April 1980 total grants to Liberia were . . . increased from \$13.8 million in 1980 to \$51,5 million in 1981".

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 29; p. 32,296).

In April 1981 US forces took part in joint manoeuvres with the Liberian armed forces and the US destroyer 'Thorn' visited Monrovia.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 28; op. 31,283).

In May 1981 the Libyan 'People's Bureau' in Liberia was ordered to close, and the Soviet Embassy in Monrovia was ordered to reduce its staff from

15 to 6. In July 1985 diplomatic relations were severed with the Soviet Union. ('Keesings' Contemporary Archives', Volume 28; p. 31,283).'

In August 1982 Doe paid a two-week official visit to the USA during which he had a meeting with President Ronald Reagan. The US government agreed to provide training facilities for the Liberian armed forces, together with military aircraft and \$15 million in military credits during 1983.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 29; p. 32,296).

In September 1982 the International Monetary Fund approved grants to Liberia totalling \$88 million.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 29; p. 32,297).

In February 1983 Liberia signed an agreement with the USA worth \$5 million for an improvement of Roberts International Airport in return for the granting of refuelling facilities for US military aircraft.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 29; p. 32,296).

The Rigged Elections

As a result of

"... pressure from Washington", ('Financial Times', 1 August 1990; p. 4).

particularly from

"... a Congress alarmed by Mr. Doe's systematic abuses of human rights". ('Financial Times', 1 August 1990; p. 4).

in July 1984 political parties were allowed to reform ban, subject to registration by the government. on political parties was lifted. By the time elections were held (in October 1985), four parties had been registered: Doe's own 'National Democratic Party of Liberia' (NAPL), and three opposition parties -- the Liberia Unification Party, the Liberian Action Party and the Unity Party.

"It was noted that those parties which had succeeded in obtaining legal status were considered to be right of centre". ('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 32; p. 34,146).

In October 1985 elections were held, in which Doe was declared elected President, with 51% of the vote, while Doe's NDPL was declared to have won 22 out of 26 seats in the Senate and 51 out of 64 seats in the House of Representatives. By early November all the opposition parties had denounced the elections for

"... intimidation and irregularities". ('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 32; p. 34,147).

while the US Congress had characterised them as

"... fraudulent... marred by intimidation and ballot rigging". ('Financial Times', 1 August 1990; p. 4)..

Only 9 representatives of foreign states (including that of the USA) attended

Doe's inauguration.

'Human Rights' Breached

Although the US government -- and especially the US Congress -- paid lip-service for political reasons to its concern for 'human rights',

" . . . Washington had turned a blind eye to detention without trial, torture and summary execution".
(*'Time'*, 6 August 1990; p. 27).

and to the fact that

" . . . more than \$500 million in economic aid and military assistance . . . Doe used to put down domestic opponents".
(*'Time'*, 6 August 1990; p. 27).

Before the election had been held, however, the Liberian government had committed the gravest 'breach of human rights' imaginable to Washington: it had defaulted on the repayment of its loans

In June 1985 the International Monetary Fund ruled that Liberia was no longer eligible for IMF credits because of its failure to pay on time arrears of some \$52.4 million.

In November 1985 Doe announced austerity measures, including 25% cut in the salaries of government servants:

"The measures were seen as a response to IMF demands for economic reforms".

(*'Keesing's Contemporary Archives'*, Volume 32; p. 34,148).

Early in 1986 both Houses of the US Congress passed resolutions urging the Administration to suspend 'aid' to Liberia on the grounds that the 1985 elections had been rigged and that the Doe regime's record on human rights was 'poor'. The Administration, however, rejected Congress demands on the grounds that

" . . . President Doe had the power to govern".

(*'Keesing's Record of World Events'*, Volume 33; p. 34,979).

In April 1986 US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker visited Liberia and had talks with both Doe and the opposition party leaders. The latter were arrested in May.

Although economic 'aid' to Liberia had been suspended under US law because of arrears of debt servicing payments, which by 31 March amounted to \$660 thousand, after Crocker's visit it was announced that the USA would give Liberia \$42 million in economic 'aid' during 1986. The funds had reportedly been made available in exchange for 'political concessions' from the Liberian government.

(*'Keesing's Record of World Events'*, Volume 33; p. 34,979).

In January 1987 US Secretary of State George Shultz visited Liberia,

" . . . urging President Doe to undertake political and economic reforms".

(*'Keesing's Record of World Events'*, Volume 33; p. 34,979).

Shultz praised Doe's elections as

" . . . quite open",
('Time', 6 August 1990; p. 27)

and as signifying Doe's

" . . . genuine progress towards democracy".
('Time', 6 August 1990; p. 27).

He did, however, express 'serious concern' about a secret arms purchase agreement signed between Liberia and Romania. President Doe had paid an official visit to Romania in October 1986.

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 33; p. 34,979).

However, the USA continued to finance Liberia during 1987 at a time when most of the country's backers donors had suspended 'aid'. The World Bank, for example, took such action in June 1987 because of the Liberian government's arrears in repayments, resulting, it was alleged, from

" . . . corruption and local mismanagement,"
('Financial Times', ibid.; p. 4).

Nevertheless, US 'aid' to Liberia was cut to \$36 million in 1987 and to \$31 million in 1988, and the Liberian government was warned that US 'aid' would cease unless payment of \$7 million of arrears was received by May 1989.

('Record of World Events', Volume 35; p. 36,610).

In January 1988 a team of 17 US financial experts arrived in Liberia and were given effective control of the Liberian government's finances:

"The advisers . . . were empowered to countersign all financial documents issued by the government".

('Record of World Events', Volume 34; p. 35,885).

However, the American experts found themselves so frustrated by the Doe bureaucracy that their two-year contract was terminated after one year.

By this time Liberia's foreign debt totalled \$1,700 million, with arrears on repayments amounting to \$671 million.

('Record of World Events', Volume 35; p. 36, 610).

BY 1989, THEREFORE, THE DOE REGIME HAD CEASED TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO UNITED STATES IMPERIALISM, AND ITS INTELLIGENCE SERVICE SET IN MOTION FORCES DESIGNED TO CARRY THROUGH ANOTHER COUP WHICH WOULD REPLACE THIS REGIME WITH MORE ACCEPTABLE LOCAL PUPPETS.

A New Coup is Prepared

In May 1984 a former employee of the Liberian government named Charles Taylor was arrested in the United States and charged with misappropriation of \$1 million of government funds. However, it was later announced that he had 'escaped from custody' and in December 1989 he appeared in the Ivory Coast in command of a small armed force which he led across the frontier into Liberia.

('Review of World Events', Volume 30; p. 32,898; Volume 36, p. 37,174).

By the spring of 1990 Taylor's armed force was some 15,000 strong, had taken the name of the 'National Patriotic Forces of Liberia' (NPFL), had

occupied most of the country and had advanced to the outskirts of Monrovia. ('Le Monde', 1 August 1990; p. 3; 'Review of World Events', Volume 36, p. 37,174; 'The Independent on Sunday', 5 August 1990; p. 14).

"An American offer to ferry Doe to safety was refused. His soldiers in the mansion are said to have told him that he could not leave without them".

('Sunday Times', 5 August 1990; p. 21).

The NPFL is very far from being a disciplined force:

"His men . . . look as though they are at a weird fancy dress party.

Instead of camouflage fatigues, they sport brightly coloured track suits. Some turn up for battle in crash helmets, others don dressing gowns and women's wigs . . .

Looting has been rife on all sides".

('Sunday Times', 5 August 1990; p. 21).

The Split in the NPFL

In February 1990 one of Taylor's officers, 'Prince' Johnson,

" . . . executed a number of NPLF commandos for alleged looting and desertion".

('The Independent on Sunday', 5 August 1990; p. 14).

This aroused Taylor's wrath and a split occurred in the NPLF forces, Johnson breaking away with a force some 500-1,000 strong.

('Le Monde', 1 August 1990; p. 3).

Johnson accused Taylor of being

" . . . a criminal and a rogue".

('Financial Times', 1 August 1990; p. 4).

and, embarrassed by Taylor's

" . . . refusal to commit himself to elections,"

('Time', 6 August 1990; p. 27),

by July 1990 the US imperialists had come to regard Taylor as as unacceptable as Doe:

"Both Mr. Taylor and the man he is trying to overthrow, President Samuel Doe, are now seen (in Washington -- Ed.) as dangerous and unacceptable leaders".

('The Independent on Sunday', 5 August 1990; p. 14).

and transferred their backing to Johnson:

"Mr. Johnson's men (are) thought to have at least the tacit support of the US. . . .

Diplomatic sources saw the offensive by Mr. Johnson . . . as a US-inspired move".

('The Independent on Sunday', 5 August 1990; p. 14).

While Taylor's forces were still camped on a 'Firestone' rubber plantation some 30 miles east of Monrovia, at the end of July Johnson's forces

suddenly appeared at the gates of Doe's mansion, According to Tom Woweiyu, Taylor's 'Defence Minister',

" . . . the US helped airlift 'Prince' Johnson and his fighters into central Monrovia". ('The Independent on Sunday', 5 August 1990; p. 14).

The three-sided civil war continues at the time of writing.

Meanwhile, on 29 August, at least 600 civilian refugees, including women and babies, were murdered by Doe government troops in St. Peter's Lutheran church in Monrovia.

('Financial Times', 31 July 1990; p. 22).

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

On 2 August 1990 North Sea oil workers began industrial action for union recognition and more adequate safety measures. Shell declared that 1,000 contract workers who sat in and ignored an ultimatum to return to shore were regarded as having 'dismissed themselves'.

By 4 August Britain's entire North Sea oil industry was on the brink of an all-out unofficial strike. The Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) said that more than 100 rigs and platforms, involving more than 10,000 maintenance and catering workers, were expected to respond to the call for strike action.

THE UNACCEPTABLE FACE OF CAPITALISM

The Confederation of British Industry stated on 31 July that 10,000 jobs were being shed monthly as a result of falling orders. The National Westminster Bank reported that the failure rate among new companies had risen from 50% to 65%.

('Guardian', 1 August 1990; p. 1).

* * * * *

Dr. Bruce Stafford, of the University of Birmingham, reported that nearly a million families are in danger of losing their homes after falling behind with mortgage repayments.

('Daily Mirror', 2 August 1990; p. 1).

* * * * *

According to independent experts, some residents of Camelford in Cornwall who had 20n tonnes of aluminium sulphate released into their water supply two years ago have suffered brain damage and memory loss.

('Guardian', 24 July 1990; p. 1).

* * * * *

In March 1988 Armando Belonia, a prisoner in Wandsworth gaol, died because the prison doctor had wrongly diagnosed and treated his viral pneumonia as a muscular disorder. The prison doctor later had his name erased from the medical register. But the Board of Visitors at Wandsworth Prison, to whom the case had been referred by the Westminster coroner, were denied access to all the patient's medical records.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 21).

* * * * *

According to a report of the all-party Commons Environment Committee, swimming off Britain's coast may lead to stomach upsets, skin problems, and ear, nose and throat infections. Britain is currently facing prosecution by the European Community over three of its most polluted beaches, including Blackpool.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 20).

* * * * *

The National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux reported in July that landlords are demanding deposits averaging £400 from prospective tenants in the private sector. The deposits demanded, which in London can exceed £1,000, are beyond the means of many people on low incomes. In addition to deposits, tenants are usually asked for four weeks' rent in advance, and also a non-returnable sum as 'key-money'.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 3).

* * * * *

The Queen will receive an increase of more than 50% in her civil list money next January, when she will receive a payment (which will no longer have to receive parliamentary approval) of £7.9 million a year. Ten other members of the Royal Family will receive pro rata increases at a cost of £2.52 million a year.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 20).

* * * * *

According to government figures released on 23 July, the number of people living on half the average income soared by more than half to 7.7 million in the two years 1985-87. The proportion of children living in households receiving less than half the average income rose from 14.7% in 1985 to 20.2% in 1987.

('Guardian', 24 July 1990; p. 20).

* * * * *

National Power, the larger of the two private generating companies, announced on 26 July plans to shed 5,000 jobs over five years and to shut down more than 10% of its generating capacity.

('Guardian', 27 July 1990; p. 20).

* * * * *

New allegations of a cover-up of secret government 'sweeteners' over the government's sale of the Rover Group to British Aerospace are to be investigated by the Commons Trade and Industry Committee.

('Guardian', 26 July 1990; p. 1).

IN THE FORMER SOCIALIST WORLD

Ion Cioaba, Romanian gypsy representative to the United Nations, complained that in the last few months racist attacks on gypsies had grown to monstrous proportions in Romania.

('Guardian', 29 July 1990; p. 13),

* * * * *

Gorbachev's plan, launched in 1988, to allow peasants to lease land has run into difficulties. One factor is the resentment of state farm workers over the reappearance of kulaks.

('Guardian', 31 July 1990; p. 8).

* * * * *

Hungary's new Land Law provides for the purchase of the land of the cooperative farms by individual members of the cooperative. The collectivisation of agriculture in Hungary was economically very successful, producing enough grain to feed 15 million people from a population of 10 million and earning one-third of Hungary's hard currency income -- £840 million.

Peter Toth of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives 'wrings his hands' in gloom., saying "We must keep in mind modern agricultural practices. The future lies in large farms".

('Observer', 29 July 1990; p. 13).

* * * * *

Romania's Houses of Parliament have adopted plans to offer shares in 80% of state enterprises. However, the only people with enough spare funds to purchase such shares are corrupt ex-officials of the Ceausescu fascist regime or black-marketeers.

The largest trade union, the Confederation Brotherhood of Trade Unions, expects half a million jobs to disappear from the chemical industry alone when market forces come into play.

Before the May elections, industrial action by miners, transport workers and air traffic controllers won large wage increases.

('Guardian', 27 July 1990; p. 8).

* * * * *

Pentacon, in Dresden, the last big camera manufacturer in Eastern Europe, has been forced by competition from Japan to lay off all but 150 of its 5,700 staff. The former Pentacon staff social club has been leased to a West German firm as a pornography shop.

(Guardian', 27 July 1990; p. 20).

* * * * *

Robert Maxwell has signed agreements to invest £30 million in Bulgaria's printing, newspaper, television and tourist industries. He plans to invest in the Slavia football team, to open a foreign trade bank and business centre, and to publish a Yellow Pages business directory.

* * * * *

The first attempt in the Soviet Union to prosecute a leading neo-fascist for anti-semitism failed when the judges were unable to keep order in court. Thousands of Soviet Jews are emigrating because they fear a wave of anti-Semitic pogroms.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 8).

* * * * *

The new 'freedom' in Eastern Europe has gone hand in hand with a significant deterioration in the social position of women. In past years women in Romania held 33% of the parliamentary seats, now they hold only 3.5%. Similar drops have been recorded in Czechoslovakia (from 29.5% to 6%) and in Hungary (from 20% to 7%).

The social change has also been reflected in the transformation of woman's image into a sex object. Engaged in a fierce battle for circulation, most newspapers feature nudity. Poland's news stands, in particular, are full of badly printed pornographic material.

The rise in unemployment has been accompanied by a notable growth in prostitution.

('Guardian', 25 July 1990; p. 8).

* * * * *

One of the most financially profitable examples of entrepreneurial success in contemporary Poland has been Warsaw's 'Intersex' shop which sells peek-a-boo panties, aphrodisiacs and lifesize inflatable dolls imported from West Germany.

('Guardian', 1 August 1990; p. 8).

COMBAT is published by: The Communist League,

26, Cambridge Rd.,

Ilford,

Essex,

IG3 8LU

The Communist League is a Marxist-Leninist organisation, the aim of which is to build a Marxist-Leninist Party in Britain which will lead the working people to establish a planned socialist society.