

EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily
Reflect Or Represent The Views Of
The Portland Observer

Civil Rights Journal Nigeria's Day Of Infamy

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
Now that South Africa is free, it seems that Nigeria is fast becoming the African nation with the dubious honor of being "the most repressive regime."

With the Nigerian government's execution of nine human rights campaigners, including writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigeria has now become a nation condemned by the world.

Despite warnings from the international community, Nigeria's military ruler, General Sani Abacha proceeded with the execution of the leaders of the Ogoni people, who had been protesting the government's action in their land. Earlier this year Human Rights Watch, the international human rights organization, released a report showing that Nigeria's military had carried out a two year war against the Ogoni people, who live in an oil-rich section of the country. The report detailed attacks on civilians, including shooting of unarmed villagers, gang rapes of

women and the burning of homes.

The human rights activists executed by the government had been imprisoned for over a year, ostensibly for the charges by the Nigerian military of inciting riots which led to the murders of four Nigerian traditional leaders. However, few actually believe that the soft-spoken and professorial Mr. Saro-Wiwa guilty of those charges. He did lead a movement which demanded that the government protect their homeland's environment from misuse by U.S. oil companies and that the federal government share oil revenues with Ogoni people. Shell Oil in particular had been a target for Mr. Saro-Wiwa's movement.

Many believe that it was the demand for the sharing of oil revenues that ultimately led to the executions. By controlling Nigeria's oil, which provides 80 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings, General Abacha and many senior military officers are said to have become multi-millionaires.

This had occurred while the rest

of the nation has become poorer, with per capita income dropping to \$250 in 1993. With an inflation rate of more than 100 percent annually, Nigeria's currency is virtually worthless. Last year a government panel found that the government could not account for \$12.2 billion in oil sales made during the Persian Gulf War. A nation once known for its excellent higher education system now has seen that crumble, and repression has replaced free expression. Nigeria is falling quickly into total economic and social decay.

While nine of the Ogoni human rights activists were executed, others remain in prison. Other Nigerians, including former military president Olusegun Obasanjo, who had been accused of plotting against the government but had his death sentence commuted, are still in danger. In reality, the whole nation is being held hostage to the Nigerian military dictatorship.

The world has the responsibility of condemning what is happening in

Nigeria. The Commonwealth nations, of which Nigeria is a part, have suspended Nigeria. And while the U.S. has protested the executions, the Nigerian government has proved that they do not respond to words and warnings. Only action will cause the Nigerian military to respond. Only political and economic isolation will impact that government. Only targeted economic sanctions, particularly related to Nigerian oil, will impact that government. Only targeted economic sanctions, particularly related to Nigerian oil, will impact that government. Only the freezing of the assets of the Nigerian military regime, as was done in Haiti, will impact that government.

(Note: Write to Senator Nancy Kassenbaum, chairperson of the Senate Sub-committee on Africa, U.S. Senate, Washington D.C. 20510 or write to Shell Oil, Philip Carroll-Pres., One Shell Plaza, 901 Louisiana Street, Houston, TX 77002 and ask them to take action against further human rights violations in Nigeria.)

Vantage Point

Aristide Stiffens Resistance to World Bank/IMF Economic Plan

BY RON DANIELS

A little more than a year ago, the Haitian people waved American flags and welcomed U.S. Troops as they landed to displace the coup leaders Cedras, Francois and Biambly. The stated goal of the U.S. Brokered agreement was to ensure the safe return of President Jean Bertrand Aristide to Haiti to finish his term in office.

What the Haitian people were unaware of was that the U.S. had its own agenda and reasons for returning Aristide to power. President Aristide campaigned on when he was elected to office by a landslide in 1990. Aristide promised land reform, an increase in the minimum wage, and other policies which would ameliorate the plight of Haiti's suffering masses. He also pledged that he would resist efforts to make Haiti a neo-colony of the U.S. and other foreign investors. Aristide's militant egalitarian rhetoric quickly caused him to fall into disfavor with Haiti's wealthy elite and the U.S. government. The coup d'etat which toppled Aristide from power was in no small measure precipitated by his commitment to real democracy and people based economic development. His first four months in office made it abundantly clear that his campaign rhetoric was not just electioneering but real. Hence, President Aristide was overthrown with the complicity of the U.S. government.

During his stay in the United

States, there was a concerted, government sponsored effort to discredit Aristide and undermine his popularity with the Haitian people. The last person the U.S. wanted to return to power in Haiti, its public pronouncements to the contrary, was Jean Bertrand Aristide. The fact that Aristide was democratically elected by such an overwhelming margin and the ruthless repression of the Haitian people at the hands of the coup leaders placed U.S. policymakers in a bind. They were forced to consider restoring Aristide to his presidency. The question was under what conditions would the U.S. be willing to return Aristide to power?

The terms were quite steep. The U.S. brokered agreement called for President Aristide to leave office in January of 1996, thereby relinquishing the three and a half years which he was unable to complete in office because of the coup. The U.S. also demanded that Aristide agree to a "structural adjustment program" fashioned by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

According to an article in The Peasant, the official Newsletter of the Peasant Movement of Papay Education and Development Fund, key elements of the structural adjustment program include: "Opening up Haiti's economy by reducing all tariffs to zero; privatizing state-held enterprises; establishment of a pro-business environment to attract foreign investment, including incentives for export oriented industries in the as-

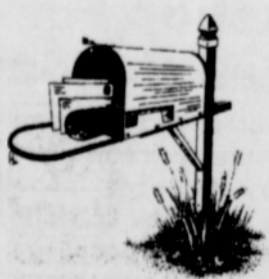
sembly plant sector; suppression of wages..." Under this plan everything from the state-held flour mill to the airport, the cement works, telephone company, the seaport and the banks would be taken over by foreign investors. Hence, Haiti would become something akin to a giant "Empowerment Zone" in the U.S. with outside interests exploiting cheap labor, tax breaks and give aways to create enormous fortunes for their investors.

Faced with the continued slaughter of Haiti civilians, including large numbers of militants from the popular movement, Aristide reluctantly agreed to these terms and returned to Haiti riding on the bayonets of what became a U.S. occupation force. There is no question but that Aristide does not favor the World Bank/IMF plan. But until recently he has largely been held hostage to the international agreements which returned him to power. It now appears that President Aristide may have been stalling for time awaiting the outcome of the elections for a new national assembly to begin to play his hand.

The result of the elections, in which Aristide's Lavalas Coalition scored a sweeping victory, coupled with growing protests in the street, indicate that the Haitian people are overwhelmingly opposed to the World Bank/IMF sponsored foreign take over of Haiti. The open and growing opposition to this highly unpopular plan has created some space for President Aristide to maneuver and he is showing signs of

stiffening his resistance to the imposition of the World Bank/IMF structural adjustment program. He recently shuffled his cabinet, replacing Prime Minister Smarck Michel, who generally favored the rapid implementation of the structural adjustment program, with Claudette Werleigh, a Lavalas loyalist who previously served as Foreign Minister. Though Aristide seems willing to thwart the World Bank/IMF plan, he is still in a very precarious position. The international community, led by the U.S., is threatening to cut off various forms of aid to Haiti if the Aristide government does not comply with the structural adjustment program.

The current situation in Haiti poses a major challenge to the U.S. - Haiti solidarity movement which seems to have gone to sleep at the wheel since the return of President Aristide. Though we must continue to support President Aristide, the real struggle for authentic democracy and development is being waged by the popular movement. It is critically important that the solidarity movement intensify the effort to mobilize material support for the popular movement to enhance its capacity to be an effective voice for the Haitian masses. Finally, the solidarity movement must mount a campaign to expose the designs of U.S. the government to make Haiti a neo-colony. President Aristide's resistance to the World Bank/IMF plan will be fortified by the popular movement and the work of the U.S. - Haiti solidarity movement.



Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Some 125 Local African Americans Attended An All Day Workshop

BY WILLIAM COUNCIL

"If your house was burning, and your children were in it, would you care who brought the water", so quoted one of the speakers at the Saturday informational meeting who gave credit for the quote to the Reverend Lowery, Southern Christian Leadership Conference at the October 16, 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

Some 125 local African Americans, mostly males, attended this all day workshop at the Lutheran City Ministries at Skidmore and Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. The workshop commenced at 9:00AM with co-chairpersons brothers Lorenzo Poe, of the Coalition of Black Men and Gary X of the local Muslim temple officiating. Several very important

persons attended including Bishop Wells and Representative Avel Gordly. Contributions of money and people resources were made by other community organizations.

The diversity of the group was emphasized by one of the speakers who attended the march in Washington who said he was impressed by the nature of the group, from the man who was there with no shoes to the brothers who had on \$900.00 suits. It appeared to be the same here in Portland as the young and old, low income and middle income, male and female attended this event.

The organizations that could readily be identified included representatives from Albina Ministerial Association (included the use of the building furnished by Rev Gilmore), the NAACP, Coalition of Black Men, Nation of Islam, and the Black Unit-

ed Front. While there was probably other organizations present and participating, they were not identified.

The program was exciting. Some six (6) representatives who attended the Washington event gave very exacting and emotional accounts of the trip. One brother who was in Boston at the time and traveled early on the day of the event, said that he thought that he was going to have problems locating Portland people, only to enter the mall and see a very large brother with a coverall suit on proclaiming of the back "City of Portland."

Brother Jerome Polk, along with others such as James Posey, O.B. Hill, Floyd Cruse spoke of how impressed they were with the crowd behavior. Each one of them, in some fashion, indicated that there was so much love, emotion and caring in the group. In fact, one brother stated that

the action was in the crowd and at times he did not pay attention to the speakers and had to come home and listen to the tapes.

During the highlight of the event, a video tape presentation by the Minister Farrakhan, Brother Gary X presented the group with the speech, entitled "Willie Lynch Address: In the year 1712." Brother Gary X also passed out the pledge that was taken in Washington and here. Both of these are reprinted here for your information.

There is a Local Organizing Committee that has been organized here to carry out the program so articulated in D.C. and by so many of the eloquent speakers here. If you are interested in following up and being involved in the program, please contact the Nation of Islam, NAACP or the Coalition of Black Men.

perspectives

A Renaissance For Northeast?

The "Renaissance" is described as the transitional movement in Europe between medieval and modern times beginning in Italy in the 14th century - a humanistic revival of art, literature, science and architecture. I am using the term as a metaphor for the fluid and volatile situation in northeast demographics and real estate.

Now, just how "humanistic" this socio-economic evolution will be regarded probably will depend on the view-point of the particular observer (economic interest). It was only a few months ago that I wrote here of the changing nature of traffic on Northeast Alberta street which, by the way has become a high speed arterial--to high. Over a period of just five years, the ratio of five blacks to one white has exactly reversed itself.

Along this Alberta Street corridor and other arterials, and particularly in respect to the adjoining residential districts, real estate prices (and rents) have doubled in many cases. A key question is what does this mean to those long-time area residents and potential investors who did make some overtures in response to my articles.

The past few years where I've pointed out that Portland African Americans of 50 and a hundred years ago found no difficulty in pooling their salaries and resources to develop multiple housing units and commercial properties.

Will the impact of today's fast-moving economic and social changes on the area galvanize the area's residents into some long-overdue efforts in the self-help vein--or will many continue to wait "absentee landlords" or "gentrification."

There have been comments that those old-timers did not have the "advantage" of today's assistance from federal, state and city agencies, but yet they succeeded with their "investment clubs and employee's association in a magnificent manner and across the country.

It occurs that this may be exactly why they did succeed--initiative, drive and common sense. If, today, we add those public sector

supports, can there be any excuse for failure to develop one's own community. I am thinking in particular of all the recent statements of "commitment and renewal" on the part of those brothers returning from the "Mother Of All Marches". Will it be more rhetoric? Will we be like the "Red Queen" in Lewis Carroll's famous book, Through The Looking Glass? The Red Queen was noted for running simply to stay in the same place: On a treadmill!

I certainly hope not and I certainly hope we are not going to have more situations here like

one failed real estate venture in Washington, D.C. -- a scene with which I am intimately familiar. In 1971 I delivered a lecture to that section of the student body at Howard University involved in technology. My theme was a "Renaissance" was needed in terms of the early black contributors to the technology of the Industrial Revolution (using my book, "Black Inventors of America").

Carried away by the success of the lectures and a stimulating reception by the student body, I mistakenly carried over this upbeat vision to the general community -- which was "Talking-that-talk" and making noises about an economic "Renaissance". Not too far from the school and a few blocks from the White House was a group of rundown mostly vacant stone apartment buildings. The absentee landlord across the river in Virginia was bankrupt and wanted out -- "no more blacks, please."

After several months of conversations with the high-level, super-educated blacks who "talked" economic development it became obvious they had no interest in 'reality'. They refused to consider any uses of the properties and it reverted to the city. The last time I was in Washington (1991, twenty year later), the property had long since been bought and converted to sophisticated apartments for high level bureaucrats (\$100 a room). And blacks were crying "gentrification-ripoff." Like Portland?



By
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