

Update on the situation inside Nigeria

Awareness League

1996

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Nigeria is increasingly a pariah in the international community, a rouge state which finds company with countries such as Libya, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Burma and Iran. The mere mention of the country's name evokes a typical image characterized by corruption, military dictatorship, debt, disease and disaster. Nigeria is living dangerously and this, even by Africa's long suffering standards, speaks volume for a country blessed with abundant oil and gas reserves, several solid minerals, agricultural potentials and overflowing human capital. Three decades of military rule have spawned the monstrous specter of unfreedom, denial of fundamental human rights, violent subjugation and brutalisation of the psyche and spirit of the overwhelming majority of the population. The tragedy of Nigeria is underlined by the facts that the country continues to live well below her potentials; the economy is in ruins. The population is held prisoner by the barrel of military armour that has brought the country to its knees.

REVIEW OF AL'S ACTIVITIES IN 1996

1996 was both a trying and rewarding year for the Awareness League and its membership. As usual AL had several brushes with security operatives and the military membership. Two seminars/political education workshops put together by AL, one at Engu and the second inside the campus of the University of Nsukka, were disrupted by plain clothes police and men of the state security service (SSS), who claimed that they were acting on "orders from above". They said both meeting were illegal and were designed to sabotage the transition to civil rule program of the junta. They confiscated materials meant for the workshops, but made no arrests.

In response to the strike action embarked upon by lectures in all of Nigeria's Universities, the authorities initiated massive clampdown on the teachers and other activists known to sympathize with the lecturers. Hundreds were arrested and detained, while the umbrella union of the teachers, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was proscribed by military decree. Two lecturers, who are AL members were detained in the course of the general clampdown for a period of three months. They are: Comrade Ahmed Ojefia of the University of Uyo and Comrade Rex Denedo of the University of Jos. Interestingly, their incarceration has done little to dampen their faith and commitment to the struggle for a just and better society.

On July 26, 1996, AL in conjunction with three other left groups organised a peaceful protest in Ibadan, about 150 kilometers Southwest of Lagos to press the junta to release all activists and journalists, incarcerated since Abacha seized power in November 1993, especially those jailed on trumped-up charges of coup-plotting. A follow-up week long anti-military enlightenment and education workshop slated for the second week of August, 1996 was called off as a result of a massive clampdown that followed a planned nationwide strike by some oil workers unions, We later held our annual conference on October 29, 1996. The congress was attended by about 65 delegates.

The intensified repressive tendencies of successive military regimes have dictated a reassessment of tactics and strategies on the part of AL, without necessarily losing focus of the wider Libertarian objectives. To this end, AL in 1996 undertook a new initiative to establish cells and networks in select industrial establishments. Before now, AL's activities were concentrated in the Universities, media houses and the states' civil services. The focus of the new drive is to make AL's presence felt in other key sectors of the economy. So far, we have witnessed modest successes, with the establishment of medium size networks within the ranks of junior bank workers

in Engu, Jos, Owerri, Benin Asaba etc. As well as among the radical wing of oil workers in Warri, Calabar and Port-Harcourt in the oil devastated Niger Delta Region.

The implication of this development are immediately obvious: AL can directly participate in major oil and bank workers strike actions henceforth, in addition to the opportunity to enlarge its membership and bolster awareness about anarcho-syndicalism within the ranks of Nigerian workers.

AL'S ADMISSION INTO IWA

The IWA secretariat in Madrid, Spain, via a letter dated 17th December, 1996, informed us that the XXth Congress of the IWA-AIT has admitted AL as the Nigerian section of IWA. We welcome our formal admission into the IWA fold, even though we have for sometime now been a part and parcel of the IWA family.

We would have loved to be there physically to witness the proceedings of the Congress but our efforts were thwarted by our inability to obtain the necessary Visa documentation. Our admission comes against the backdrop of on-going efforts to build a viable organization, and to propagate the concepts of libertarian socialism to an African audience. The task is, by no means, an easy one. AL will continue to count on the active support and encouragement of the IWA secretariat to be able to execute its programs.

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