

The Post-Colonial State: Crisis and Reconstruction¹

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Economic Crisis and State Failure

Economic crisis in much of Africa has led to foreign state intervention on an unprecedented scale, involving the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and a variety of foreign aid agencies. Difficulties in repaying foreign debts have provided exceptional scope for arm-twisting. The state is to be 'rolled back', prices and markets deregulated, state enterprises privatised, and public sector spending cut [Carlsson 1983; CODESRIA 1985; Lawrence 1986; Havnevik 1987]. Much is standard liberalisation policy which some of the agencies push anywhere, anytime. Such policy has found particular justification, however, in the widely publicised failure of the African state.

This failure has been bemoaned from left, right, and centre. The picture is one of excessive state intervention, bureaucratic bottlenecks, maladministration, waste, inefficiency, misappropriation and corruption. It is contrasted with the achievements of East and South-East Asia where a 'developmental state' has provided favourable conditions for rapid capitalist development [IDS 1984, 1986].

Radical nationalists are as devastating in their critique of the state, although they differ in their greater

emphasis on the external causes of the crisis, and in particular, the role of multinationals and their local allies in distorting state policies. From this perspective, the reform strategies imposed by international agencies lead to the deepening of foreign domination and further distortions.

Writing-off the African State too easily

How useful is the prevailing critique of the post-colonial state? What is its theoretical foundation and what political implications are drawn or can be drawn?

Too much current writing on the African state substitutes tales of corruption and mismanagement for an analysis of social forces and processes. This may be helpful for those primarily concerned with the rolling back of the state, while simultaneously boosting the interests of existing ruling classes. It is less helpful for those struggling to make the state serve the interest of national emancipation and popular democracy. The misreading of the state and the balance of forces at work is an invitation to all sorts of dangers, including defeatism, and cooptation on the side of popular democratic forces.

Three approaches to explaining the crisis of the African state feature prominently in current debates. The first blames the incapacity of the African state primarily on personal rule and tribalism. This I will discuss as the *neo-patrimonial* theory. The second emphasises the monopolistic position of the bureaucracy and the political class in the economy. This I call the *monopolistic* theory. The third focuses on the distortion of the state caused by imperialist domination, which I shall refer to here as the *comprador* theory.

These are ideal-type explanatory models. In practice, elements from different models are combined. It is an attempt to capture the differences in focus between the three sets of writers that will be discussed below. I will argue that, despite their differences, they have three important deficiencies in common, all related to a tendency to write-off the African state too easily, ignoring long-term processes of class and state formation:

firstly, there is a failure to take African ruling classes seriously, including their expanding material base, their ideological commitments (nationalism),

¹ Preliminary versions of this paper have been presented to a conference on 'The state and economic restructuring in Europe and the Third World' at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, in September 1986, and to the African Futures Conference of the Centre of African Studies, Edinburgh, December 1987. It will be included in the *Conference Proceedings*, due for publication in 1988. The argument is primarily developed in relation to Nigeria, but draws on a previous attempt to generalise about state and class formation in the Third World [Beckman 1982b]. I have benefited in particular from discussions with colleagues and students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where I taught between 1978 and 1987, and at Bayero University, Kano, where the paper for Edinburgh was discussed in a Political Science Department Seminar in November, 1987. The paper also draws on discussions in the Uppsala-based AKUT Group — the Working Group for the Study of Development Strategies, of which I am a member, and its current research programme, 'Labour and democracy: economic transformation and popular struggles' [AKUT 35, 1986]. Support has been obtained from the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SAREC) for a new project where I will further develop the argument, both specifically in relation to Nigeria, and in a comparative study of six West and North African states [Beckman 1988].

and the way in which they enhance their competence and build their class institutions; secondly, the foreign stake in the processes of state and ruling class formation is grossly underestimated. The post-colonial state, I argue, must be seen as a transnational project; thirdly, there is a tendency to ignore the growing organisational experience of subordinate classes and their ability to impress themselves on the administration of state power.

This article seeks to go beyond theories of stagnation and decline, all rooted, I argue, in ideal-type notions of an absent 'national bourgeoisie' that is supposed to serve as the historical agent of real capitalist development. I am concerned with the way in which the crisis generates its own counter-forces, seeking to overcome obstacles in their way. Such forces emerge at the level of both ruling and subordinate classes. The crisis wipes out physical assets, industries, development projects, roads, schools. It cannot as easily eliminate the class forces and aspirations entrenched by previous developments.

The crisis provides an arena for contestation based on the experiences and organisational competence that have been accumulated over long periods. External forces have their stake. International reform strategies are partisan interventions in the contest, often assisting in suppressing popular democratic alternatives. The article ends by discussing the scope and limitations of the latter.

The Neo-patrimonial Theory

In *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*, Richard Sandbrook (1985) sees personal rule coupled to communal ties as the central factor behind political decay and the failure of the state to provide appropriate conditions for capitalist development. Elsewhere the state has facilitated capitalist accumulation (p.33). In Africa, states are 'overwhelmed by their own incoherence, indiscipline and shrinking fiscal base' (p.38).

Why is this so? The principal reason, according to Sandbrook, is the absence of strong classes. The modern state in the West and Japan evolved within the context of class societies. Class power and a 'pluralist political system' made it disciplined and responsive. In Africa, class forces are too weak: 'Where then is the social agent to champion capitalist transformation?' (pp.38.9). In the absence of a hegemonic class capable of forcing coherence and discipline on the state, 'personal rule' or 'neo-patrimonialism' becomes the order of the day (p.118).

Sandbrook provides an anatomy of personal rule. It is a sinister picture of greed, tribalism and violence. The state becomes penetrated by personalised relations,

based primarily on communal ties. They operate to satisfy personal and communal aspirations at the expense of legitimate functions. States are reduced to machines for the distribution of booty (p.117).

Most African administrations, Sandbrook suggests, diverge so widely from the Weberian model of hierarchy, objectivity and discipline that the use of the term bureaucracy is misleading (p.116). As a result, capitalism cannot thrive. Opportunities for profit may exist but mainly in the 'manipulation of the state', not in 'risk-taking entrepreneurial activity' (p.137). Most states are threatened by a 'self-reinforcing spiral of political decay and economic deterioration':

At the nadir of this spiral lies chaos. A fictitious state of armed men detaches itself from society and preys upon a dying economy (p.41)

A gloomy picture, indeed. What prospect for an alternative future does Sandbrook envisage? He disagrees with Hyden (1983) who suggests that once market forces are liberated, history will take its course, bringing forth a bourgeoisie capable of giving direction to the state. Sandbrook does not see this happening. To him there will rather be further development in the direction of 'highly factionalised neo-patrimonial systems' (p.155).

Nor does he see much hope for democracy. The best feasible alternative is 'decent, responsive and largely even-handed personal rule' (p.157). He does not rule out the possibility that 'nationally minded and modernising bureaucracies led by far-sighted political leaders will emerge here and there' (p.156). Houphouët Boigny and Kenyatta are offered as examples of this possibility.

The Monopolistic Theory

The gloom of much current writings on the African state is vividly captured by the nursery rhyme title of a recent contribution to the Sussex debates on the 'developmental state' [IDS 1984, 1986, 1987]:

All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty-Dumpty together again [Dutkiewicz and Williams 1987].

The image of the broken egg is telling enough, but does it make sense? The authors develop with some rigour an argument that focuses on the difficulty of reforming the African state. One may guess that the Polish experience may have contributed to the analysis. The pathology of the state is traced to monopolistic state intervention during the colonial period and the unproductive 'political class' that emerged from that heritage. The authors seek to show how an etatist approach to development ('the developmental state') leads, through its own logic, to the fiscal and foreign exchange crises from which the state and the political class are unable to disentangle

themselves.

The monopolistic position of the state in the economy makes political and administrative positions the most fruitful means of securing economic resources for private use. State agencies proliferate. Bribery and corruption become the normal form of official transactions and a necessity for engaging in private business. The political class seeks to legitimise its authority by offers to client groups, generating factionalism and tribalism (p.41). Political instability encourages it to take what it can while the going is good.

Just as with Sandbrook's spiral of decay, Dutkiewicz and Williams emphasise the vicious circle. As state activity expands, management capacity declines. State officials resist reform, despite the deepening crisis. They cling on to whatever piece of patronage and resources they control (p.43).

The contradictions built into this process lead either to the 'consolidation of oligarchic rule and a stagnation of political life', or, at the opposite extreme, 'an escalation of military and civil violence' (p.44). The authors cannot see how this deepening crisis of the state can possibly be solved by a 'revolution from above'. Yet in their view, the prospects for a 'revolution from below' are equally bleak, although they end by urging socialists to give priority to the development of democratic organisations and institutions.

The Comprador Theory

The most radical critics of the performance of the African state are found at the African end [see for instance, in the Nigerian case, Osoba 1978; Abba 1985; Onimode 1982; Usman 1984, 1986]. The downfall of regimes and subsequent public inquiries have produced massive documentation of theft, corruption, and mismanagement to support the radical case.

The dominant perspective is anti-imperialist and nationalist (for a discussion, see Beckman 1981, 1982a, and 1985). The 'political class' has failed to make the state an instrument of national development precisely because it serves the interest of foreign domination. The political class mediates this relation, collecting fees and commissions for its services. It is therefore not a proper bourgeoisie but rather a class of middlemen or compradors, to use the Portuguese term applied to trading agents who mediated between the foreign coastal enclaves and the hinterland in Imperial China.

The state exercises comprador functions. It buys goods and services of doubtful value and inflated costs from foreign firms so that commissions can be collected by state officials, politicians, and businessmen who either award the contracts or assist in linking-up the contracting parties. Part payments are made to

private foreign bank accounts. Other kick-backs come in the form of well-paid membership of Boards of Directors of foreign firms and in influence over the appointment of sub-contractors, distributors, and employees.

Many of the resources potentially available to the state for development purposes (or for paying school teachers and nurses) are thus either misdirected, appropriated for private purposes, or siphoned out of the country. Such looting is exacerbated by reckless borrowing. Foreign banks and state institutions willingly offer to finance the inflated, kick-back ridden deals. Thus the future of the country is mortgaged. Rising debts breed their own vicious circles as more and more of the nation's resources become tied to debt repayments.

What are the prospects for reform? Unlike the gloomy pessimism described above, the radical nationalists envisage far-reaching changes. They call for all patriotic forces to unite and eject the compradors from the state. On the one side stands imperialism and its local lackeys; on the other, an entire people who have everything to gain from stopping the bleeding of the nation's resources. Usman [1984] calls on 'workers, peasant farmers, artisans, teachers, professionals, retailers and capitalist industrialists' to take full control of the economy.

Differences and Agreements

How different are these three perspectives? What are the common denominators? Personal rule, bureaucratic monopolisation and foreign domination feature in all three. The difference lies in the choice of focus. They differ also in their political conclusions. Sandbrook settles for more efficient and benevolent personal rule as the most realistic option. Dutkiewicz and Williams shift attention from the gloom of the state, to which they offer no solution, to the possibility of building democratic organisations. They agree with Sandbrook, however, on the need to free markets and reduce state intervention. Radical nationalists reject foreign sponsored liberalisation, seeing it as a means of enhancing foreign domination. They want radical nationalists to take control over the state, and they believe they can muster broad popular support for that venture.

While the differences are apparent, the agreements are also noteworthy. First of all, there is considerable agreement over the evidence advanced in support of the diagnosis of the crisis. Central to all three arguments is the squandering of state funds and the corruption and private profiteering of state officials and politicians. Generally, it is agreed that the state has failed to provide the appropriate conditions for development because of its own incoherence, indiscipline and incompetence.

The common denominator, however, that I want to emphasise is the way in which the relation between state and class formation is theorised, and most specifically, the weight attributed to the absence of a proper bourgeoisie. This is where my own disagreement starts.

Mission: A National Bourgeoisie

The crisis and incompetence of the state in all three sets of arguments is closely associated with the absence of a 'proper' or 'national' bourgeoisie. In Sandbrook's case (as in Hyden's), it is this class that should have given coherence and discipline to the state and made it serve capitalist development. For Dutkiewicz and Williams, state monopolisation of economic opportunities is both a consequence of the weakness of an autonomous bourgeoisie that was suppressed by colonialism, and an obstacle to its growth in the post-colonial period.

To the radical nationalist, the comprador state similarly reflects the absence of a real bourgeoisie that engages in productive activity, accumulation, and national development. In its place stands a class that feeds parasitically on the nation and sells it out to foreigners.

The argument about the missing national bourgeoisie contains elements from three theoretical traditions. One is the Marxist theory about the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the place of an emerging new ruling class within that process. The other is a Weberian ideal-type notion of the industrious entrepreneur, central to the growth of capitalism in the West. Elements of both have been incorporated in the third: the theories of dependency and underdevelopment. They offer a regional and conjunctural explanation of capitalist development in the epoch of colonialism and imperialism. Uneven development on a world scale and the relations of domination that it generates cause the distortion of capitalism in the Third World. The perversion of bourgeois class formation is part of this process. The state becomes an organ of this perverted class. It is incapable of resisting either internal (sectionalist) or external (neo-colonialist) pressures, and therefore incapable of providing appropriate conditions for capitalist development.

This position is most clearly expressed, of course, in the radical nationalist perspective. But Sandbrook's and Dutkiewicz and Williams' analysis have strong common features with the dependency/underdevelopment perspective in this respect.

The focus on the distortions and perversions of ruling class and state formation may be justified on both empirical and political grounds. The theory of the missing or distorted national bourgeoisie, however, can at the most be a special feature of a theory of

capitalist development of relevance to the Third World. It cannot substitute for one. There is a need to see the distortions in the context of the underlying, long-term dynamics, including both ruling class efforts to overcome obstacles in their way, and the efforts of non-ruling class forces to protect themselves against the impositions of underdeveloped capitalism and its crises.

Theories of state and crisis become undialectical if they merely concern themselves with self-reinforcing processes (vicious circles) of decline or decay without accounting for the manner in which social and political forces respond to the situation. Moreover, allowance must be made for the way in which the capacity to respond develops. In the absence of such dialectics, the political pessimism of the Sandbrook type becomes as poorly founded as the expectations of an imminent revolution on the radical nationalist side.

Let me attempt to substantiate this critique in three areas: the internal dynamics of ruling class and state formation; the transnational nature of these processes; and, finally, the role of subordinated classes.

The Need to take Domestic Ruling Classes Seriously

Ideal-type notions of an absent national bourgeoisie stand in the way of an understanding of the process of state and ruling class formation. Preoccupation with inefficiency, corruption, misappropriation, nepotism and other 'aberrations' tends to substitute for an analysis of the forces that determine the dynamics and direction of the process. The aberrations are by no means insignificant, but they need to be placed in context.

The mismanagement of a public development project, for instance, may be linked to the diversion of project resources into private use. A state farm may not be ploughed in time because the tractors are busy on the project manager's private land. It is not the diversion itself that is significant, but the nature of the process into which the diverted resources are absorbed. Is it an isolated affair, or does the state sector serve as a launching pad for an agrarian bourgeoisie? We need to observe how Africa's dominant public sector economies are integrated into wider patterns of class formation.

The post-independence period witnessed the rapid growth of a domestic ruling class in much of Africa. In some cases, as in northern Nigeria, it had roots in pre-colonial ruling classes. In many others, colonial export economies had prepared the groundwork, producing commercial and professional classes that were in the forefront of the nationalist movement. In most cases, independence created opportunities for rapid advance for such groups, as well as for a fast

rising class of senior bureaucrats, army officers, and managers within the state sector.

The result is a ruling class that distinguishes itself dramatically from the rest of the population in terms of its own material conditions and the amount of control it exercises over the allocation of resources. Although often riddled with internal divisions on communal lines, it is integrated through networks of alliances, in and out of the state apparatuses. At its disposal is a growing body of class organisations, employers' and manufacturers' associations, chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs, 'Old Boys' associations, etc. And, of course, the apparatuses of the state itself, including a growing army and police force.

As a class it depends on alliances with foreign capital and draws on various forms of aid and foreign state support. However, its control over political access gives it some real bargaining power vis-à-vis foreign interests [Beckman 1982a, 1985].

Is this new ruling class a bourgeoisie? Its composition and outlook varies from country to country. In some it exercises direct control over major means of production on an individual level. In most, it has a big stake in commerce, transport, construction, and rented housing. Through joint ventures, share holdings and board membership it is deeply involved in foreign controlled companies. Within the state sector, it lords over public enterprises and a wide range of public resources from which private 'rent' can be collected.

The typical African 'entrepreneur' presides over a complex informal network of businesses. Connections in the state apparatuses and with foreign firms are profitably combined. The mediation of foreign participation in the economy is an important, although not necessarily the most profitable aspect of this 'mixed' public-private enterprise. The management of state funds or doing business with the state can be equally rewarding.

The bourgeois orientation of this ruling class lies not only in its own mode of accumulation but in its managerial, promotional and mediating role in relation to private capital, both foreign and domestic. It is therefore justified to speak of a bourgeoisie also when referring to individuals with a primary basis in the state apparatuses or in the public sector enterprises.

But is it a 'national' bourgeoisie? Clearly not in the ideal-type sense discussed above. However, its national character should not be dismissed too lightly. The fact that it also performs 'comprador' functions on behalf of foreign capital does not prevent it from securing advantages for itself as a national class, at the expense of, or in competition with foreigners. At the level of ideology, members of the domestic bourgeoisie may also be deeply committed to strategies of

'national development', such as the advancement of domestic industry, technology, science and education. For some, the base in the public sector economy facilitates a profitable interplay between national development aspirations and private business interests: the more development projects, the more contracts.

But it is not always as crude as that. There is also a commitment to the advancement of the nation, as perceived, no doubt, from a particular class perspective. There is profound resentment of a heritage of foreign domination and racial arrogance, a desire to remove the stigma of inferiority and to seek a rightful place in the community of nations.

The primary force behind the current reconstruction of the post-colonial state is therefore the efforts by the post-colonial ruling class to secure its own survival and continued expansion. It is a hungry and ambitious class, spurred on by the demands and expectations of vast numbers of dependents, hangers-on, clients, and protégés. If these relations are characterised by 'patrimonialism', in the language of Sandbrook and Weber, they represent a dynamic force, geared to expansion rather than decline.

Reconstruction is painful and many will no doubt cling on to what they have, as suggested by Dutkiewicz and Williams. The logic, however, goes beyond the current crisis which merely hastens an historical process whereby local ruling classes, pampered by state protection, are pushed into deeper waters and made to swim.

Foreign Intervention and Reconstruction

The process of reconstruction is accelerated through foreign state intervention. The IMF and the World Bank, operating as international state apparatuses, are involved in formulating policy, monitoring performance, placing advisers in key positions, and financing reform packages, both directly and by mediating relations with other creditors and donors.

The liberal expansion of commercial lending to Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s prepared the way for this intervention. The Fund and the Bank push short-term conditions for debt management while simultaneously pursuing long-term political objectives [Havnevik 1987]. At one level, the intervention is a matter of commonsense economics (getting balances right; not spending more than you have). At another, it has a distinct political and class orientation, encouraging private entrepreneurship, liberalising markets, privatising public enterprises, restricting state intervention, and facilitating foreign private investment.

The size and technical competence of the cadres involved in such transnational state intervention increases steadily. They draw on information on the

individual countries under scrutiny that is often more comprehensive than what is normally available to national administrators. Multilateral and bilateral aid agencies are pulled into the exercise and made to fall in line with Bank and Fund policies.

How do local ruling classes respond to this heavy-handed foreign intervention? There is much resentment of the unfavourable developments in commodity, credit, and currency markets that aggravate the crisis, and increase vulnerability to foreign arm-twisting. Efforts are made to bargain for compensation. But there is a recognition of objective constraints and the need for reform. Individual liberalisation and privatisation measures are resisted by some and welcomed by others, much depending on one's place in the system.

It would be wrong to see these reforms as primarily impositions from outside on resentful local ruling classes. They reflect close interaction between external and domestic reformers. Reference to external compulsion may serve to deflect popular anger. In some cases, regimes put up a show of resistance, while concealing foreign involvement, seeking to give the reforms a more 'national' flavour.

Ruling classes in both public and private sectors are integrated transnationally. Foreign training programmes, exchange of staff, joint missions, and regular interaction combine to develop close affinities between policy-makers. Professional careers are pursued in and out of national and international state institutions, big firms, universities, and private consultancy groups. Senior positions in local branches of foreign companies are indigenised, and local elites are socialised into the culture of transnational enterprise.

The breeding of responsible and capitalist oriented local ruling classes has been a conscious policy since the decolonisation period. State development corporations, for instance, were set up with the assistance of the World Bank (International Finance Corporation) with the explicit purpose of developing enterprises that would be transferred to the private sector, once domestic private entrepreneurs were ready to take over.

In that context, the current drive to privatise is not a rupture but an integral part of an on-going process. It reflects the long-term logic of bourgeois class formation as well as the prevailing conjunctures, favourable to the acceleration of that process. The acute problems faced by the post-colonial state are used to legitimise unpopular reforms that had in fact been long in the pipeline.

The Resilience of the Post-colonial State

The post-colonial state is unlikely to disintegrate

through some downward spiral of decay. 'All the king's horses and all the king's men' are in fact at work putting Humpty Dumpty together again. Increasingly sophisticated local ruling classes are busy looking after their own houses as well as their own national development projects. In this, they are prodded, supervised, trained and financed by transnational state organs and foreign aid agencies who have their own stake.

The post-colonial state is a transnational project. It originated in most places in the efforts of the late colonial period to achieve mutual accommodation between the rising nationalist movement and two sets of rival foreign forces: the old colonial interests, anxious to preserve as much as possible of the special access they had enjoyed under colonialism, and the new ones, demanding the removal of colonial privileges. Nabudere [1978] speaks of a new epoch of 'multilateral imperialism'.

The current crisis is a new phase in the world market incorporation of the post-colonial state. The crises of indebtedness and poor world market conditions for most African exports have opened the door for foreign state intervention on an unprecedented scale, accelerating that process.

The failure to situate the current crisis of the post-colonial state within the context of the long-term process of bourgeois class and state formation, with its strong transnational backing, has important political implications. It invites defeatism and adventurism. It plays into the hands of the ruling class strategies currently at work without offering any alternative based on popular democratic aspirations.

In Sandbrook's case this is most explicit. As the dominant ruling-class logic is one of disintegration, indiscipline and decay, the political agenda is exclusively preoccupied with order. From that perspective, right-wing authoritarian regimes of the Houphouet-Boigny and Kenyatta type become the best bet [Sandbrook 1985:156-7]. In this view of Africa, there seems to be no significant role for popular democratic struggles. Democracy, it seems, is something that depends on the development of a proper bourgeoisie and is therefore ruled out.

Dutkiewicz and Williams pay homage to the building of democratic organisations, but they do not suggest how this is linked to the collapse of the post-colonial state that they so vividly depict. In practice, as in Sandbrook's case, they have little else to offer than explicit or implicit support for the transnational liberalisation programme.

In the radical nationalist case, the failure to recognise the assemblage of ruling class forces, domestic and foreign, at work on the state invites adventurism on the facile assumption that patriots in all camps, including the military, can dislodge the compradors

and their foreign pay-masters. The faulty separation of these elements from the overall logic of ruling class and state formation leads to the gross underestimation of the forces defending the present order. It simultaneously invites the neglect of democratic organisations capable of challenging it. The intervention by radical elements within the military, in the absence of an organised popular base, is bound to be frustrated. It may well cause damage to the long-term democratic effort and/or lead to cooptation into ruling class strategies, as in the case of Ghana [Beckman 1986].

The Politics of Subordinated Classes

The preoccupation with the absence of a proper bourgeoisie goes hand in hand with a failure to consider the development of the political and organisational experiences of subordinated classes and their impact on the state. Why is this so? It follows, I believe, from the tendency to focus on the perversions of ruling class behaviour, either in its mode of management (inefficiency, maladministration, etc.) or in its mode of appropriation (theft, corruption, etc.). It leads to a neglect of basic class relations, that is, those relations of appropriation and domination that constitute the ruling class *vis-à-vis* subordinated classes. This in turn, leads to a failure to situate the state (and its crises) within the parameters of such relations of appropriation and domination.

The manner in which the state is used to serve ruling class interest provides the focal point of opposition to the state by subordinated classes. The ruling class needs the state in order to overcome opposition. It uses it to regulate the relations of domination and appropriation. It represses, but it also seeks to placate and coopt. The latter require in most cases real concessions. Subordinated classes thus contribute to the moulding of the state through their resistance to its policies. Their organisation, experience and leadership influence the balance of forces that set the parameters within which the state is constituted. Also, spontaneous and unorganised popular protests have an impact.

We need to identify the contradictions that bring popular forces into conflict with the state and its transnationally backed policies of crisis management. How has the current crisis affected subordinated classes? How do they respond? How is the response influenced by the history of popular struggles and organisation?

The state and its crises cannot be understood at the level of the ruling class alone. This is true even if we choose to address the problems from a ruling class perspective. Those concerned with alternatives to current ruling class politics have of course the more reason to take the experience of the subordinated classes and their opposition to the state seriously.

Openings for Democratic Politics

The crisis of the post-colonial state creates openings for democratic politics. The extent to which democratic forces can avail themselves of these opportunities is a different matter. The general decline in material conditions accompanying the crisis leads to an intensification of popular antagonism against the state. People are hit by falling wages, rising prices, shortages, unemployment, and the erosion of public services. The situation is further aggravated by the imposition of structural adjustment programmes.

The crisis simultaneously exposes the ruling class, undermining its ideological hegemony. Factional infighting over diminishing state resources leads to the toppling of regimes. New incumbents seek to legitimise their own usurpation of power by reference to the misdeeds of those they have ousted. In the course of doing so, they unwittingly expose themselves as, more often than not, they have had their own stake in the 'old order'. Revelations are thus selective and the hypocrisy of the new rulers is there for everybody to see. Popular cynicism flourishes.

How far are popular grievances translated into support for radical alternatives? Are popular organisations taking advantage of the crisis of ruling class hegemony, advancing their own positions?

The experience so far suggests that the opportunities might be there but that they are difficult to realise, especially as much of the restructuring that goes on and the hardship that it brings may be inescapable. Popular forces may be strong enough to temporarily obstruct ruling class solutions, but not strong enough to sustain an alternative. The Ghanaian experience even suggests that a 'revolutionary' regime was required to overcome popular opposition to transnationally backed reconstruction, where an ostensibly pro-liberalisation regime had failed.

The fate of the democratic forces in Ghana, including the trade unions, who originally offered support for Rawlings' revolution highlight the contradictory nature of that experience of popular politics. However, even where regimes go to some length in repressing, disorganising or coopting popular forces the power of the latter is underscored.

The outcome of such contestation is not given and depends, among other things, on the strength and experience of democratic organisations. The recent history of popular resistance to the crisis policies of the Nigerian state, for instance, suggests that it is a running battle, with the victories by no means only on the side of the state and ruling class [Andrae and Beckman 1987].

Material deprivation as caused by the crisis creates an atmosphere of popular restlessness that easily

explodes in violent defiance of the state, as for instance, in the Minna and Lagos riots of 1987, both precipitated by police violence (see *West Africa*, July 20 July and 30 November 1987]. While such outbursts may be quickly suppressed, they may simultaneously force the state to make concessions in order to placate popular grievances.

The state and its transnational sponsors see popular resistance to the structural adjustment programmes as misguided and obstructive. Struggles by workers to protect jobs and real wages are denounced as class-egoistic, urban-biased, and anti-peasant. Unions are in many cases the only popular organisations capable of systematic opposition.

Repressive policies against workers and unions are standard features of the structural adjustment programmes. The World Bank and the IMF support such anti-democratic policies. By bolstering compliant regimes financially and managerially they enhance their capacity to override popular opposition. Conversely, without such external backing, regimes would be under greater pressure to come to terms with aggrieved social forces. Union acceptance of wage freezes and redundancies, for instance, may have to be swapped for political concessions, including guarantees for union and other popular democratic rights.

Popular resistance to structural adjustment is not necessarily either constructive or based on insights into the problems of macro-economic management. However, popular organisations have little reason to place confidence in the good intentions of the state and its foreign sponsors, especially as long as autocratic policies and repression are the order of the day. The refusal to cooperate even with 'reasonable' reform programmes is therefore not necessarily irrational, but an attempt to force popular political demands on to the agenda.

Popular resistance may not represent sufficiently coherent forces to pose an effective alternative to the state as currently constituted. However, the crisis of ruling class hegemony provides significant openings for advancing the positions of democratic organisations and influencing the direction of reconstruction.

The securing of a substantive power base for a popular democratic alternative is a long-term affair, even if there is also scope for popular political influence in a short-term perspective.

Conclusion: The Future of The Post-colonial State

The future of the post-colonial state will be fiercely contested. There is an accumulation of experience and competence on the side of both ruling class and popular forces. The transnational nature of the state project will ensure that the contestation also becomes

transnational. The forces at work are nurtured by the long-term dynamics of world market incorporation and capitalist development. It may be a slow process in terms of aggregate rates of economic growth. Growth or no growth, however, the restructuring of class relations continues. Many of the economic gains of periods of export booms, for instance, may be eliminated in subsequent depressions. Yet, the class forces generated by the expansionary phase are not as easily eliminated. Struggles to defend and advance achieved positions set the stage for the next phase.

For those concerned with the problems of popular democracy, this is high time to stop worrying over the decay of the post-colonial state. Powerful ruling class forces, both domestic and foreign, are at work in support of reconstruction. There is a need to shift attention to the experiences of the popular forces, their struggles and problems of strategy and organisation in confronting this project. It does not mean that one should stop studying the post-colonial state: on the contrary, a correct assessment of the balance of forces that underpin it is central to the analysis of popular democratic strategy. Failure to do this in the past has encouraged radicals to embark on futile 'revolutionary' strategies, leading to self-defeating adventurism and/or cooptation, either way playing into the hands of the ruling class project.

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