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## ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE BETWEEN OBOTE AND MUSEVENI: SOME LESSONS FROM OBOTE'S RULE FOR MUSEVENI'S GOVERNMENT

*Yash Tandon*

Obote and Museveni must be regarded as the two most important historical characters of contemporary Uganda. Both in their own ways were seen, at the time of their coming to power, as "radical nationalists". Unfortunately for Obote, his more recent intervention in Uganda's politics has blighted his more radical and nationalist past in the 1950s and early 1960s. Museveni still basks in the sunshine of recent victory, and his aura is still fresh.

However, one of the fascinating and continuing aspects of both Obote and Museveni is that despite protestations to the contrary by both, their politics is broadly interpreted in "tribal" terms. Obote never ceased talking about the fact that his Government had people from the "south" (especially Buganda) as well as from the "north", whilst Museveni today is at pains to point out that he too has people from the "north" in his Government and that it would be wrong to see his politics in tribal terms.

And yet Museveni too cannot hide the fact that just as Obote's army was predominantly from the "north", his own army is predominantly from the "south". During the guerilla struggle Museveni waged from the bushes, the fighters were told that "the enemy" were the "Nilotics" or the "Anyanyas", which is a reference to the people from the north of Uganda and south of the Sudan. His ouster of the Okellos from power in January 1986 was celebrated by the "southerners" as their victory (at last!) against the "northerners".

But Museveni's "southern front" did not remain united for long.

Within eight months of coming to power Museveni felt it necessary to detain three of his ministers and a former Vice-President who, although belonging to different parties, were all Baganda. Like Obote, Museveni too is facing what in crude politics is defined as "the Buganda problem". Only for Museveni the problem, if indeed it is a "problem", has come to the surface faster than during Obote's first rule.

How does one explain this phenomenon? How does one explain the persistent ethnic turn of events in Uganda, and "tribalist" interpretations of the politics of the two most historical figures in Uganda whose self-image is "radical" and "nationalist"? Is there no escape from "tribalism"? Is it so ingrained in Uganda's history and recent politics that it simply overwhelms all other forms of consciousness among the people, and the best efforts of their leaders to escape from it?

What we wish to argue in this paper is that whilst "tribal" consciousness among the people is certainly a factor, it is rendered salient by "bad politics" of the leadership. Religious and class consciousness, for example, are also significant. However, these get superseded at most times (though not always) by "tribal" consciousness which is easily manipulated by the leaders for their own narrow political interests.

These interests are defined by the essentially petty bourgeois leadership (even those professing to be "radical" and "nationalist") not in terms of mobilizing the entire population of Uganda in their struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism (despite the rhetoric), but in narrow terms of fighting one another to come to power and then to "liquidate" those described as "the enemy" by the use of military force. This necessarily has two parallel and contradictory consequences. The "challenger" relies predominantly on his own "ethnic" groups (for example, Acholi and Langi in the case of Obote, and Banyankole and Baganda in the case of Museveni) to fight "the enemy", whilst forcing "the enemy" in turn to fall back on his own ethnic groups for security and support. The forces of "tribalism" thus get mutually re-inforced on both sides.

The logic of "tribal politics", however, is curiously self-defeating, for within the "tribal fronts", each party creates to buttress its power, there are further "tribal" divisions which become salient at one time or another, whilst creating room for manipulation by the opposite forces. Thus, the divisions amongst the "southerners", for example amongst the Catholic Baganda and Protestant Baganda allowed Obote to manipulate Baganda politics and stay in power over two periods. Similarly, in the "northern front", the contradiction between the Acholi

and the Langi created a fissure in 1984-85, permitting "cross-tribal alliance" between Museveni's National Resistance Movement and the Acholi faction of Obote's "front" to oust the Langi Obote out of power.

Those who try to interpret Uganda's politics in purely "tribal" terms have an impossible task. They cannot, without being tautological or self-contradictory, explain the diametrically opposite phenomena of "tribal fronts" and "cross-tribal alliances" in terms of "tribal loyalties", for these loyalties are not so sacrosanct after all. Why should religion at times become such a potent divisive factor as to supersede the purely "tribal" factor? Why should the Acholi soldiers see themselves at times as "allies" of the "southerners" against their Luo brothers?

All we argue is that petty bourgeois politics are vastly more enigmatic than tribalist interpreters make them out to be, that Museveni is no less or no more "tribal" or for that matter "nationalist" than Obote, and that anything that divides the people is grist to the mills of petty bourgeois politics. Unity for the petty bourgeoisie is temporary, ephemeral and opportunistic. Division is what they really thrive on; it is the bread and butter of their politics. As for the "left" amongst them, it is not Marx who is their teacher but Machiavelli, though some profess to borrow from both depending on the "ideological requirements" of the moment.

The principal contradiction in the neo-colonies, such as Uganda, is between the people and imperialism, and not between one nationality against another. Tribalist analysis, however, is what one lapses into if one does not understand the ways of imperialism, and if one regards imperialism as something "external" to Uganda. So a word about imperialism is necessary before we proceed with the argument further.

### **Imperialist Role in Independent Uganda**

The root cause of the crisis in Uganda is not "tribalism", for indeed there is nothing inherently conflictual about a multi-tribal or a multi-cultural nation, unless "wrong" kind of politics make it so. At the heart of the crisis in Uganda is the crisis of neo-colonialism in Uganda. Ever since before independence, the British have tried to work out one "alliance" after another to try to "hold the situation" for their monopolies to continue to exploit the people of Uganda, but every such alliance, manipulated as "marriage of convenience" and behind the backs of the people, has collapsed.

Some readers may say, "So here we go again: imperialism is to blame for everything that goes wrong, and the local dictators are free of responsibility of the present chaos in the country." Not so. The

dictators are to blame just as much, but one must look at the nature of these dictatorships and the recent history of Uganda very closely to understand that these dictatorships have always been closely linked with imperialism, even though Obote, Amin (in his own idiosyncratic way) and now Museveni have rhetoricised against imperialism.

The first such "marriage of convenience" was forged by British imperialism on the eve of independence. Not wanting to pass power into the hands of the CATHOLIC Democratic party, which was linked with German monopolies and other European Christian Democratic tendencies, Britain manipulated an alliance between the two "regional" PROTESTANT groups - Obote's Uganda People's Congress and the Kabaka Yekka. At that time, the problem was not posed in "tribal" terms, but in terms of whether there could be a reconciliation of TRADITIONAL authority with the requirements of a MODERN nation-state. Indeed, the British colonial anthropologist, L.A. Fallers, observed optimistically: "In Buganda...there has developed a peculiar combination of receptivity to innovation - a receptivity which in itself is a great asset to a nation attempting to modernize..." (Fallers, 1961, p. 337)

It was an imperialist-forged opportunistic alliance in which a large section of the Uganda population - the Baganda - were not even given a direct franchise in the election of their representatives in the Parliament. In the event, the "coalition" collapsed, as was inevitable, and neo-colonial explanations now blamed it all on "tribalism", including its crude "Bantu-Nilotic" versions. Suddenly the Baganda became "the problem". Obote tried to "eliminate" the problem by militarist methods, but it only served to compound the "problem".

Uganda became an unstable state for British monopolies, a fact further worsened by Obote's attempt to "move to the left", and Obote was ousted in 1971 by Amin with the connivance of Britain and Israel. The Baganda came out in the streets to dance with joy.

Britain, not surprisingly, was the first to recognize Amin's regime. But the political base of the new regime was now even more fragile than before. As Amin began to run the state more by whims than by a co-ordinated policy of protecting British and other imperialist interest, it became necessary for Britain and others to accommodate themselves to this whimsical style of government as long as profits were ensured. The human carnage wrought by Amin on the people of Uganda was a "humanitarian" issue and could not be allowed to interfere with "business as usual".

Amin's anarchical style of government finally spilled over the border into Tanzania in November 1978 when he attacked and occupied

the Kagera Basin, bringing in its wake immediate reprisal by Tanzanian forces. When the various Ugandan opposition groups met at Moshi to work out a united national front in order to chart out the future of Uganda, the British found themselves not directly involved. However, they let it be known to Tanzania, then hosting the Moshi Conference, that if the outcome of the Conference did not come out right, Britain might raise awkward questions on Tanzania's "occupation" of Uganda at the United Nations. One person who was most acceptable to Britain was Y.K. Lule, who was thus invited to the conference in his "personal" capacity, and was elected leader of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). (Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey, 1982, 106-110).

Once in power, Lule was quick to send for a Commonwealth team, headed by the British economist Dudley Seers, to plan out the rehabilitation of Uganda's economy. However, Lule ignored the Moshi deliberations on how the future of Uganda might be secured on the basis of political resolution of internal conflicts, and he was ousted by the UNLF.

Neither Lule, nor his successor Binaisa, could hold the various forces together, and just as Nyerere had begun to think that perhaps Obote was the only solution for Uganda, Britain too was coming round to the view that it had no choice but to fall back on the same Obote whose removal they had engineered in 1971. Their intelligence, including reports by such journalists as Colin Legum, supplied the assurance that Obote was now a "reformed" person, and would stay away from leftist sloganeering. While he was still in Dar es Salaam, Britain had solicited and obtained assurances from Obote that, among other things, he would guarantee British investments, return British businesses which were taken over by the Amin regime and give permission to Ugandan Asians to return to Uganda. In return the British agreed to give Obote political and diplomatic support, provide aid and persuade other EEC members to do the same. The former colonial power also agreed to train Obote's army, and to sponsor, together with the World Bank, a donor's conference in Paris to finance Uganda's "Recovery programme".

Thus assured of support, Obote now moved in fact to destabilize the UNLF Government in Uganda. In this he found an ally in the Military Commission of the UNLF, whose Chairman Paulo Muwanga and Vice-Chairman, Yoweri Museveni, joined hands to stage a coup against the UNLF in May 1980.

But Museveni was out maneuvered by the Obote-Muwanga clique. The latter rigged the December 1980 elections in their favor.

Britain, in turn, manipulated the Commonwealth to send an "Observer Group" to witness the elections - a ploy that served to "legitimize" Obote's victory, and thus secure the official support of all members of the United Nations and the OAU.

Needless to add, Britain was the first country to recognize Obote's fraudulent victory. Margaret Thatcher convinced the Americans to back the regime and to give the green light for IMF stand-by credits. The full regalia of a neo-colonial restructuring of Uganda was opened in front of all eyes to see. Obote was "the man of the hour".

Whilst Britain played a key role in legitimising Obote (through the mediation of the Commonwealth Secretariat), and later in providing him with assistance to train his army, the role other imperialists played must also be mentioned. The Germans, and in particular the Christian Democratic Party and its foundation the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, all linked with German monopolies, have had an historical interest in Uganda, and close ties with the mainly Catholic Party, the DP. They decided that in the interest of protecting broader Western interests in Uganda, Obote's election "victory", though fraudulent, must be recognized. The CDU played a significant role in convincing the DP to accept Obote on the grounds that since Obote had offered to "respect" a "multi-party system", the DP still had a chance in the future.

Thus imperialist interests became a significant force not only in legitimising the rule of Obote, but also in pressuring the opposition to accept the dictatorship. Later the CDU and other European Democratic parties held an international conference in Kampala to mark the "return" of democracy to Uganda!

Manipulative politics, however, are short-lived. By mid-1984 the neo-colonial regime of Obote's was in dire crisis. The first reason for the crisis was that the people would not accept the undemocratic imposition of Obote through a rigged election massively backed by imperialism. Therefore military initiatives by Museveni, among others, received spontaneous support from the people.

Secondly, imperialism could not solve the economic problems. The IMF introduced a "double window" to control the use of "foreign exchange" hoping it would sponge all the liquid cash and control black-marketeering. But these measures dismally failed. As the Uganda shilling continued to drop in the international market, the gap between the official rate and the black market rate continued to increase, making windfall profits for those few who could secure foreign exchange even at the higher "second window". The peasants were the ones who suffered most in selling their coffee at the lower official rate, while they then had to buy their other basic necessities besides food (soap,

clothings, etc.) at the higher second window prices, further inflated by the huge profit margins added on by the middle-men "lucky" enough to secure the "import allocation".

But the thing that really buried Obote and with him imperialism's attempt to "control" the situation, was Obote's "human rights" record. The soldiers went on a rampage of looting, partly at least to supplement their meager salaries. Unlike the peasants who could grow food, the soldiers had no choice but to appropriate them. But as the resistance of popular forces against Obote's neo-colonial oppression grew wider and deeper, the soldiers acted in panic and, frustrated at NRA's hit and run tactics, they massacred the civilians instead, including women and children.

The Americans were the first imperialist country to "officially" take note of the human carnage perpetrated by Obote's army, but the British Government kept on hoping that with their help, Obote would control the situation. However, the representatives of finance capital were getting concerned. The London *Economist* of 25 August 1984 finally recognized that "there is a problem here for Britain and for the West in general, the main source of Uganda's aid." In a telling self-indictment of their neo-colonial agent in Uganda, the *Economist* added: "Yet butchery cannot pass unmentioned just because the butcher happens, for the moment, to be ours." It then went on to wave the imperialist stick at Obote: "President Obote should be told that his aid is at risk unless he does better."

But the neo-colonial regime was already crumbling, and in anticipation of this, imperialism had already begun to make overtures to all other contending forces to see if new alliances could now be forged to set up a new neo-colonial regime. After the fall of Obote in July 1985, the first people to jump at the opportunity that the new situation had offered were not the British, but the Germans, and in Uganda, the Democratic Party. Leaders of the the DP thought that their Catholic connection with the two Okellos who ousted Obote would - at last - secure them a foot in the machinery of state power. So they quickly formed an "alliance" with the very people whom they had earlier condemned for violation of human rights. Ginter Husch, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Vice Chairman of the German Parliamentary Committee on Development Aid visited Uganda soon after the appointment of DP members in the Okello Government. On his return, he issued a statement in which he urged the German Government to increase aid to Uganda because the country had now a government with a "Christian" Party. (Joshua Sempebwa, 1985).

The British were shrewder. They had sent in their feelers to test



the ground with Museveni. Their intelligence, including reports by some well-placed journalists in the bush with NRA forces, (including one who is now the Chief Editor of the Government paper in Uganda, "New Vision") indicated that Museveni was essentially a pragmatic nationalist, and one who was very popular with the people. They concluded that they could do business with the NRM. The British and the Americans then put pressure on President Moi of Kenya to preside over bringing Museveni into the Okello "alliance". Lonrho undertook to oil the negotiations by ferrying around Museveni in a private jet.

At the same time, a private British security firm, Defense Services Limited (DSL), which has had several years of experience in Uganda through Falconstar and which had direct links with British Ministry of Defense officials, notably Maj-Gen. Pollard was asked to make "discreet" approaches to Museveni. After Museveni's take-over in January 1986, Pollard successfully negotiated the continuance of British military assistance to Uganda.

In 1980 the British had gone out of their way to peddle Obote, as "the strong man", the "only one" who could control the situation. In 1986, they found in Museveni the "man of the hour!". In the face of such manipulation by imperialism in order to protect monopoly interests and their profits in Uganda, one would have expected the "nationalists" to unite the people in a common front to frustrate imperialism, and to return real democracy to the people. But no. Petty bourgeois politics is rooted in divisive politics, and in seeking out "internal" enemies against which to rile the emotions of the people. Fresh ammunition is thus preferred to imperialism to divide and rule the neo-colony.

Obote and Museveni, both products of radical Ugandan nationalism, must bear responsibility for deviating the course of Ugandan nationalism, and must face the charge of history that they allowed Machiavellian considerations of real politik to divide Ugandans. To two aspects of this we must now turn.

### **"Broad-based Governments of National Reconciliation"**

One common feature to both Obote and Museveni is that they professed to form a "broad based government", or, to use a term which sounds politically even more tintillating, a "government of national reconciliation". Obote presided over such a government at independence when the UPC and the *Kabaka Yekka* were brought together under circumstances that we earlier discussed. This failed, and ended up in the incarceration of many of Obote's ministers, and Mutesa's exile. Obote tried it again in 1980-85, the outcome of which

we all know. Now, eight months after Museveni formed his own "broad-based government", he has detained some of the top leaders of the parties in "alliance", including three of his own ministers.

How does one explain this seemingly recurrent pattern in Uganda's politics? This must be done obviously in terms of the peculiarly divisive and Machiavellian character of petty bourgeois neo-colonial politics which we described earlier. One or two specific features of the politics of forming "broad-based governments" may, however, be described in greater detail here, with special reference to the recent experiments of Obote and Museveni. One aspect of this common to both Obote and Museveni is that underlying their "broad-based" government is the assumption that such a government must reflect the "balance of military power" between the various groups brought into that government.

An interesting historical anecdote goes back to the period when, after Amin's invasion of the Kagera basin, Nyerere tried to persuade Obote and Museveni to form a "broad-based" government. Museveni, to the utter amusement of Obote, demanded a 50/50 share-out of power. Asked Obote of Museveni: "How many commanders do you have in the field?" Obote contended that since he had a larger "army" than Museveni, he could not countenance a 50 percent share out of power, and on that broke down the negotiations between the two.

After Obote's fall, when the Okellos formed the interim administration, they tried to bring Museveni in by offering him a certain number of seats in the Cabinet, as well as power-sharing in other areas of state activity. Museveni once again insisted on 50/50. The negotiations lengthened into months until Museveni was strong enough in the south to call all the shots. By the time agreement was reached on power-sharing, it was already dead. The NRA simply marched over the ramshackle and internally divided armies of the "broad-based" government of Lutwa, took over power, and now, from a position of strength, began to negotiate with each of the other parties and "armies" separately to see how they could be "accommodated" in his "broad-based" government, and on his terms.

As the *Weekly Review* of Kenya observed, "It is noted...that both UFM and FEDEMU were formed for the sole purpose of overthrowing Obote and taking the leadership of the country. It happened that the NRA beat them to the game but this did not mean that they had abandoned their ambitions. According to the analysts these fighting groups did not join Museveni's government on principle, but for survival...The only reason that they agreed to be co-opted was because they were weak and were biding their time, seeking other

alliances in the hope that they could also garner enough strength to overthrow Museveni. Museveni, for his part, is also said to have co-opted them in a marriage of convenience, since he did not trust them either. He, too, was biding his time, waiting for the right moment to get rid of them. Both sides knew they were plotting against each other." (*The Weekly Review*, Nairobi, October 10, 1986, pp. 14-15).

This, then, gives the second important feature about these "broad-based" governments, namely their inherent instability. Since power is shared on the basis of military strength on the grounds (or, as Obote put it, on "how many commanders you have in the field"), it encourages each party to try to "outbalance" the other(s). Such a "balance" is never really achieved. What is achieved instead is an "arms race" between the contending parties, which is inherently unstable.

This then becomes the basis for the third important ingredient of the "broad-based" governments. The party that achieves "superiority" attempts now to perpetuate its superiority through denying the other parties to organize themselves. Co-option is nothing but an attempt at containment. By bringing possible dissidents "within the fold" they are placed inside this side of legality, so that any breach from this "legality" is interpreted not as a "political" act but as a "criminal" act punishable by due processes of the law. During Obote's first administration, he had alleged that his ministers and Kabaka Mutesa had solicited military assistance from the British to overthrow his Government, and therefore he had no choice but to incarcerate them. Similarly, Museveni argued, in relation to the October 1986 arrests, that those arrested had contact with the rebels based in southern Sudan, that they were trying to dislodge the Government, and thus were guilty of treasonable act, i.e., they had committed a "criminal" act, and hence they had to be tried by the courts. He therefore had no choice but to detain them, and let the process of law take its course.

"Now we are saying," the Government newspaper, the *New Vision*, said, "that there must be open politics. If people are within and organize clandestinely, then the NRA must unearth them." (*New Vision*, 7.10.86). However, the question is: when party politics are banned, how do you practice "open politics"?

A corollary to the majority party calling all the shots is that those that have "lost out" go either underground and/or overseas to acquire arms and military/political support and to organize themselves to challenge the party in power. Thus the newly-created Uganda Popular Democratic Movement (UPDM) openly appealed to the Americans, charging Museveni of being a "Communist and a Gaddafi man", one who was trying to "discredit western powers in whose cultures our

people have been nourished".

A fourth feature of these "broad-based" governments is that after the "minority" parties have lost out, the "majority" party then either encourages members from the minority parties to "cross the floor" or hand-picks "leaders" from the minority parties to represent them in the government in order to perpetuate the myth that the government is still "broad-based". During Obote's second administration, after holding DP Members of parliament in Busoga in detention for various periods, he "persuaded" all of them except one to cross the floor to UPC, and he made an alliance with the Muwanga faction of the Baganda to show that his Government was truly "national".

In the present period, the NRM does this by picking and choosing between the various leaders of the parties with which it is in "alliance". Those who toe the NRM line are "good", those who don't are "bad". Thus, Museveni went out of his way to explain that the arrest of some of the leaders of the other parties (DP, UFM, UPC, and FEDEMU) was done on an individual basis and it did not mean the end of the "broad-based" government. "What happened is that some individual politicians got involved in a plot without even the consent of their parties. They did it as individuals not as parties. These parties have been represented in government." (*New Vision*, 25.7.86). Answering questions on "regional" representation in the Government, Museveni analysed the composition of his Government and concluded: "So it is not a tribal affair but a question of which individual is ready to serve the interests of the people".

To summarize the discussion on this point, we would say that both Obote's and Museveni's method of forming "broad-based" governments have had the following characteristics: They are (were) militaristic, based as they are (were) on the military "balance" of power; they are inherently unstable; they are undemocratic, formed as they are over the heads of the people, and without their involvement; they give the "majority" party all the winning shots, and to "contain" the minority parties within a spurious constitutional legality; they drive the "minority" parties opportunistically to accept the "hegemony" of the majority party, but all the time these parties wait in the wings to see how the majority party might be dislodged; they are based on the majority party "picking and choosing" between the leaders of the minority parties, and creating or widening the gulf between the leadership of these parties and the masses; and finally, but most importantly; they provide an opportunity for imperialism to play upon the divisions amongst the people the better to exploit them.

This is not an argument against "broad-based" Governments,

only against the way they have been formed by successive regimes in Uganda. Of course, the argument does not stop here. NRM's argument for going about the way it has done since it came to power is that the old parties in Uganda had become outdated in the new (revolutionary) circumstances of Uganda. Some of these parties, they argue, are openly "tribalist", and others, to use Museveni's favorite expression, are "primitive fascists". How could one negotiate, in mutual respect, with "tribalists" and those who had blood of the people on their hands?

This implies, of course, that right from the start, negotiations with these parties, and incorporating them in a "broad-based" government, were for Museveni purely a way to buy time, hoping that if they were banned from organizing themselves for the interim administration of four years, they would somehow "wither away". What, then, would take their place? It is hoped by the NRM that instead of the old type of party system, what the "new" Uganda would have is a structure of "Resistance Councils" democratically elected from the grass-roots, and moving upwards from the village, parish, sub-county to district levels. These would provide the democratic basis for the extension of the National Resistance Council (NRC), which would thus constitute the national parliament. Thereafter, it is argued, parties, and other types of political organizations and groups should have no grounds for existence outside the RCs. The people, through the RCs, would determine their own future, and anybody wanting to express his/her political opinion would be able to do so through the structure of the RCs from the grass-roots to the national level.

However, there are serious flaws in this arrangement, and in the final analysis it still boils down to the "picking and choosing" of leaders for the people, and a further hardening of the position of the Government against those who cannot be part of this arrangement. First, the process of the formation of the RCs is full of political pitfalls. The RCs should follow, not precede, a political dialogue and reconciliation between the different parties; instead they seem to be a way of superseding them, of squashing them, making them redundant. This itself creates suspicion among the older parties, and their resistance becomes a brickwall against possible future reconciliation.

Secondly, those political parties and groups which have a different point of view from those of the NRM (for example, on the Ten-point-programme of the NRM) are not given an opportunity to express their viewpoint in this interim period when "participatory" democracy is supposed to be taking roots. So where do they go if not underground? They are not a party to the "Ten-point programme" or

NRM's programme of politicisation, and may well be opposed to them.

Thirdly, and apart from the above problems of principle, there are practical problems. What happens in those areas where the NRM does not have political following, and where the people insist on electing the UPC or the DP or whoever? We have evidence that in these situations, the elections to the RCs are annulled, until the day (perhaps) when the people are sufficiently "politicised" to return NRM candidates to the RCs. "Special District Administrators" are appointed to "supervise" the election to the RCs, but how are these SDAs themselves elected? In other words, a state bureaucracy is used to create a party structure on the ground, whereas it should be the other way round.

Then there are a host of delicate problems in the north and the east. The Government so far has attempted to resolve these through military rather than political means. How do you form Rcs in this kind of near civil war situation? Thus, an idea which is sound in theory since it is based on the principle of "participatory democracy" is turned upside down in the interest of a single political group which, even if it has all the "right" answers, still does not constitute the whole nation. The danger is that those who will not participate, or are not allowed to participate, in this process are likely to be damned as "responsible" for their own woes, for "holding themselves out", and therefore "answerable" to the state for what might be alleged as their "dissident" or "criminal" activities. The final outcome cannot be very different from the days of Obote when he refused to dialogue with "bandits", because his government, he claimed, had been "elected" by the people.

### **The Militaristic Methods of Resolving Contradictions Among the People**

This brings us to the next point. The militarist method has two problems. It debases those who use it, and it debases those against whom it is used. The Luwero Triangle is a gruesome testimony of both. One evening in November, 1986, four armed men of the NRA came "looking for girls" in the village of Walukuba in Busoga. The chairman of the Resistance Council telephoned the near-by Quadaffi Barracks to come and apprehend the soldiers. The RCs, we have earlier seen, are the chosen instruments of participatory democracy, and are tasked, among other things, to look after matters of law and order in their areas. The Walukuba RC Chairman had expected men from the Quadaffi Barracks to come and discipline the four soldiers. Instead the RC Chairman was treated to a lecture on how "we fought for you in the bush", and castigated for interfering in military matters when they were

purely civilian bodies. The four soldiers were released. (*Weekly Topic*, November 12, 1986, p. 12).

Although a small incident, (and indeed much larger incidents might have been cited), it has all the ingredients of militarism. "We fought for you" singles out the "military" contribution to liberation to the denigration of all other kinds of contribution (including political) which people made towards the downfall of Obote's dictatorship. It also becomes a "license" in the hands of the men in uniform to treat "you civilians" with derision and contempt. Although NRA's record, compared to the that of Obote's UNLA, has been generally impressive, this was so as long as they were in the bush, and did not enjoy "state power". Now that they enjoy state power, their "militarism" is coming to the surface.

Earlier in the same week that the above incident happened at Walukuba, soldiers burst into the house of the editor of the *Weekly Topic* ( a paper that is critically sympathetic to Museveni), and searched his house, as also the office of his brother, a former Member of Parliament. Later they arrested a few people in the area who previously had UPC connections. All this was done without informing the Resistance Councils of the area, thus undermining their authority and relevance in matters of "high security".

When criticized, the NRA is consistently defended by Museveni on the same grounds that "they fought for you". It is clear that Museveni derives his legitimacy and authority more from his army than from the political efforts of "the civilians". The RCs with all their weaknesses analysed earlier, are nonetheless never likely, under Museveni, to acquire political control over the army, and hence militarism is likely to remain, as under Obote, the hallmark of Museveni's regime. The soldiers' contempt of the civilians is matched by Museveni's contempt of those who are not in agreement with him. A dialogue with those with whom he is in political disagreement is anathema to Museveni.

Following the October 1986 arrests, Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga suggested that a Round Table Conference might be the best way to bring people from the north to dialogue on how Uganda's present crisis might be resolved. To this Museveni replied: "There will be no round table conference with them. Never." He went on to add: "Anybody who is tempted to use guns against NRM will be crushed by force of arms". (*New Vision*, 21.10.86).

"Crushing" all opposition by force of arms is Museveni's inheritance from Obote and Amin. This is not to say that in politics the use of the military is never justified. Indeed, oppressors seldom retreat

until they are faced, in the final analysis, with the military might of the oppressed peoples. Museveni's own victory against the forces of oppression Obote represented is proof enough.

But the military, to justify itself, must have a just cause. "Crushing" all political opposition by the state machine is not a just cause. It is self-serving in the interest of perpetuating power, and no amount of rationalisation or "legalism" ("they are breaking the law, therefore they must be crushed") can vindicate it. An example of such rationalisation, this time in the name of "democracy" is the Editorial in *New Vision* (Government paper) of October 21, 1986. It reads:

"Dialogue and debate are the fundamentals of democracy.

Without criticism and discussion, a society ossifies and progress grinds to a halt."

But there are some people with whom it is difficult to have a constructive discussion. Those people include the rebels presently fighting in the north. Sometimes force is necessary to protect democracy. Now it is suggested that the NRM government should have round-table talks with the tattered remnants of the forces that have oppressed Uganda for the last twenty years.

"Eventually, within a few months, the rebels will be wiped out. The concept of round-table talks offers only an illusionary peace. For the hope of a brief moment of peace in Acholi and Teso, a group of ruthless army officers and soldiers would be allowed to return to Uganda to share in government. That would be a fatal mistake and could only lead to killings and bloodshed on a far greater scale than anything in the north at the moment."

Which alternative offers a lasting or "illusionary", peace only time will tell. We hold out little hope for peace attempted by "wiping out" the "rebels" in the north or the east. Such were the illusions nursed by Obote, too.

The more radical members of the NRM Government hope, on the other hand, that the "Luwero spirit" would regenerate itself in other parts of Uganda, and help solve the problem of the north. Their mouth-piece, the *Telecast*, had this to say: "The Luwero spirit is the spirit which was used to direct misguided supporters of dictatorial regimes to throw their lot in with pro-people forces." (*The Telecast*, 22.10.86).

The problem with this is that the shoe now is on the other foot. It is Museveni who is holding state power, and the "rebels" who are in the bush. The "Luwero spirit" is a spirit of defiance, of resistance, of opposition. If it regenerates itself in Gulu or Kitgum or Karamoja (creating a new "triangle"), it is not likely to be led by the NRM. On the



contrary, the NRM would be "obliged", given its militarist approach, to "crush" the "spirit" lest it gets out of control, and threatens state power.

Following the October 1986 arrests of opposition elements within his own Government, Museveni spoke on state radio and television to mark the 24th anniversary of Uganda's independence. In justifying his action, he is reported to have said that the NRM took over power in January under its own steam and without the consent of the "criminals" in Southern Sudan or the "treacherous elements" in Kampala. "Most of these elements were then on the enemy side", he went on, referring to the Energy Minister Andrew Kayiira and Environment Minister David Lwanga, who were earlier arrested. The report went on that the President said his Government had no alternative but to wage war against the rebels and the cattle rustlers in north-eastern Uganda. (*Sunday Nation*, Nairobi, 12.10.86).

Militarism brings in its wake other kinds of problems. It is also internally corrosive for the army itself. If you are not fighting a "just war" but only engaged in "crushing" the "rebels" against the state, or cattle rustlers, then the "spirit" that comes through fighting a just war is lacking, and the question arises as to who should go to the front and fight the "rebels". The Democratic Party's newspaper, the *Citizen*, reported in October 1986 that the campaign by NRA against rebels in the northern and eastern Uganda had come up against internal problems within the army itself, with a number of NRA soldiers reportedly refusing to go to the front line.

"Sources have intimated that their main reason behind this refusal to fight, is the alleged discrimination being practised by some commanders within the NRA hierarchy against fellow soldiers of other tribes. Such discrimination is said to be particularly manifested in the way the soldiers are deployed to the disturbed areas, the sources said, adding that...some 'privileged' tribes with 'contacts' in the high NRA circles get preferential treatment and are rarely sent to the trouble spots...On seeing the corpses of their fallen colleagues, most of which are of less privileged and discriminated tribes, the soldiers refuse to go to the front." As a result, the paper went on to say, many of them have been imprisoned in various army barracks pending their transfer to Luzira Maximum prison. (*The Citizen*, 30.10.86).

## Conclusions

Under the NRM Government there is, of course, some change, but definitely not qualitatively different from what we have had over the

last twenty four years. The "broad-based" government of Museveni's is no different, in character and style, from Obote's "broad-based" governments. There is more "radicalism" in certain sections of the NRM, and talk of "grass-roots" Resistance Councils, but this has not been clearly thought through, and in practice have become instruments of manipulation by the NRM, just as many similar ideas had become instruments of manipulation by Obote in the past. Finally, men in uniform are the ones who still call the shots in matters of national concern, and divisions within the people are "crushed" by the use of military force.

In the meantime, whilst Ugandans are fighting amongst themselves, and the Government waging a war against the "rebels" and other local "enemies", imperialism continues to tighten its noose round Uganda's economic neck. One has yet to carry out a full analysis of the effects on the economy and on the social structure in Uganda of the Obote/IMF/World Bank economic strategy followed during the period 1980 to 1985. However, one or two things are obvious enough.

The first is that the peasants paid the heaviest price for that "strategy". One index of this was the way the exchange rate operated. The peasants were paid at the official exchange rate for their coffee, whilst they bought most of their consumer goods (excepting food) and inputs at the inflated black market rates.

The importers on the other hand, benefitted to the extent that they could secure foreign exchange and import licenses. By securing foreign exchange at the official rate, they made massive capital gains, although they had not to lift a finger to make those gains. The productive sector of the economy thus lost out to the trading and speculative sectors.

The borrowers of money from the banking institutions made gains because of the divergence between the interest rates and the inflation rates. Even when the interest rates were as high as 40 percent when it came to repaying their loans, the interest was more than compensated by the inflation rate of more than 150 percent. By the same token, lending institutions lost money in real terms.

The World Bank acknowledged this belatedly. In its memo to the Government on October 30, 1986, the World Bank wrote: "From 1982 to 1986, the real interest rate paid by beneficiaries has gone from positive to about 41 percent p.a. negative. As a result, while UDB's cost of operation increased by 137 percent p.a. over the 1982-84 period, income from operations grew by only 65 percent p.a. Consequently, UDB sustained losses in each of those years and its share capital fell from US \$3.3 million in 1982 to US \$0.8 million by the end of 1985."

(*Weekly Topic*, 12.11.86).

Ironically, the objectives of the WB/IDA credit to Uganda were to secure "the rehabilitation of existing productive enterprises and the strengthening of UDB (and Uganda Commercial Bank) to more effectively undertake financial intermediation for development." The effect, however, was quite the opposite. The two financial institutions ended up weaker than before with a net decapitalisation of their assets.

During the Obote regime the World Bank was parrying all attacks on the regime, holding out Uganda as a model of "success". It is only now with Museveni's Government in power that it has admitted to the sorry state of affairs that existed during the five years of Obote's rule without admitting, however, (typical of the Bank's behavior) that it itself was the author of those strategies.

Now it is trying to get the Museveni regime to rectify the mistakes of its own making by cutting off IDA credit facilities to Uganda, and by making the regime take measures that are bound to be very unpopular. In return for re-opening the channels of "assistance" from the WB and the IMF, (and with these, the assistance from other centers of capital) the latter will insist on an "austerity" program which with the Museveni Government can ill-afford to impose on the already impoverished population of Uganda.

Among other things, for example, the Fund will probably insist that the official exchange rate is aligned to the parallel rate (which is the Fund's terms for "black market" rate). Indeed, since the coming to power of the NRM Government the divergence between the official and "parallel" rates has reached an unprecedented gap. According to the World Bank's own estimates, we have the following figures:

	Official rate (Shs/US\$)	Parallel rate (Shs/US\$)
June 1985	650	1400
Oct 1986	1400	8000

If the obviously overvalued Ugandan shilling were to be aligned to its "real" value, one effect of this would be to open the door for foreign investors to buy off Ugandan companies and Ugandan assets at dirt cheap prices, thus "denationalising" whatever little "national" control there is over the economy. What would happen, of course, is that many local companies, desperately trying to survive, will make joint

venture agreements with foreign capital (private or institutional), thus compradorialising them. It is this class whose pressure on Museveni is going to increase enormously over the coming years, and no amount of shouting about "clean leadership" will help.

Of course, it is not simply a question of exchange rates and inflation, for these are only the monetary expressions of the intense struggle that is going on between imperialism and the people of Uganda. It is in the struggle against imperialism and its local beneficiaries against whom the NRM has to arouse "the Luwero Spirit", metaphorically speaking. What needs to be done is to begin a dialogue with those who are in opposition, and to unite the people against imperialism.

What Museveni seems to be doing is quite the opposite. He is trying to liquidate all opposition (an illusory dream), and to assure imperialism that he can guarantee security in the country so that foreign capital can flow in and "develop" the economy and make its profit in "peace". In that sense, Museveni is not doing anything different from Obote. However, it must be noted that that road led Obote to perdition.

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