CONTENTS

SOCIAL DEFENCE AS NATIONAL DEFENCE: THE CHOICE FOR NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of any defence system is predicated on the extent to which it is people-centred and people-oriented. An adequate defence system is, therefore, one which is built around the entire population as opposed to the purely military character it is given in countries like Nigeria. The civilian, like his military counterpart, is a very important defence resource for any country. Just as the military sector is looked up to for the defence of the country, the civilian sector deserves the same (even more) consideration for the same purpose. This means that the welfare of both sectors is a pre-requisite to an effective defence system.

It is in this sense that we argue here that social defence, which is the protection of the people from exploitation, oppression and other forms of dehumanization, is also national defence. That is, by giving protection to the masses of the people from all forms of exploitation and oppression, and by guarranteeing them a good life and a future for their children which is equally free of exploitation and oppression and full of life, the country is also being defended from both internal and external threats. It is then that national defence, which follows from social defence, becomes a people's defence.

In this paper, the essential elements of social defence or a people's defence will be enumerated and discussed. The advantages which a people's defence bestows on a country, as well as the disadvantages which a country suffers from the lack of it, will also be discussed. We will further show the material basis of a people's defence and demonstrate its effectiveness by citing relevant historical examples. The Nigerian situation will then be analyzed using the concept of a people's defence. We shall argue that this is absent in our own context because of the dominance of the capitalist social formation which alienates, exploits and oppresses the majority of the people. Finally, we shall argue for the adoption of a people's defence system through the institution of the socialist social formation which alone can protect the people from exploitation, oppression and other inhuman conditions of life.

This is because the socialist system has proved to be more egalitarian than the capitalist system.

THE ESSENCE OF SOCIAL OR PEOPLE'S DEFENCE

The basic question to be asked about defence is: What is being defended? The kind of answer given to this question by any country determines the effectiveness or deficiency of its national defence system. This is also related to the question of the material basis or defence as well as that of the system of production prevalent in a country at the given point in time. As a result, what gets defended is either the interests and privileges of a small minority ruling class or the interests of the masses of the people.

A social formation which does not give to the masses of the people the material comfort resulting from their labour, but instead exploits and oppresses them generates an anti-people defence system. It denies the people participation in the appropriation of the fruits of their labour and this makes them not to identify with the dominant interests in the country. They therefore will not defend it even if they are compelled to do so. The strategy will then shift in the direction of a strong military force organized around people who are no more than mercenaries to defend the privileged position of the minority. This is often not an adequate guarantee for success. It is this kind of situation which a capitalist social formation engenders. It does so by alienating the masses of the people through excessive exploitation, monopolization of power and wealth, the denial of basic social equality, and the perpetuation of injustice, among others. In such a situation, the ruling class relies on a defence system built on a strong military force rather than on the people. As victims of the capitalist system, the people are normally busy fighting its ills rather than become allies in its defence. The history of countries with a capitalist social formation in the contemporary period, especially during the 1980s, clearly demonstrates this point. The protracted struggle within the European Community over the Social Charter is a case in point.

However, a people's defence is one which is organized around the people and is carried out by them. It follows from a social formation which gives them full life and protects them from all forms of deprivation and insecurity. The socialist system, even as it was practised in the early part of its existence in Russia and Eastern Europe, and in Cuba, for instance, approximates this situation. The socialist system seeks to free the people by giving them ownership and control over the means of production as well as appropriation of surplus. This explains why Cuba's attempt at building a socialist society has survived despite the enormous pressure unleashed on her by the United States of America. The Cubans have so far remained resolute in the defence of their choice, because it offers them a better deal, its weaknesses notwithstanding. Thus, any system which seeks to offer so much to the people will not be abandoned by them. They will therefore rise to defend such a system any time it is threatened because their interests are also being threatened with it. Such a defence system is likely to be adequate and successful because it is concerned with the fate of a whole community or

people. What is to be defended is a people and a way of life; their "just rights, liberties, properties, privileges and immunities against tyranny, arbitrariness and oppression"[1].

Thus, the essential characteristic of a people's defence is its emphasis on the need to provide the basic necessities of life to the people and protect such from being taken away from them. Such necessities of life range from land, employment, shelter, food, good health, human rights, to education, etc. where the production system is geared towards the provision and preservation of these, the generality of the people will identify with the system. They will take it as their own especially since they participate fully in the life of the society rather than being mere spectators in matters affecting their very lives. Furthermore, such a system will be successfully defended because the people will voluntarily rise to defend it. A people's defence is always effective because it tends to unite the entire population around issues of common interests to them. Historically, those societies which were able to do this normally succeeded in defending their territories. And those which operated exploitative and oppressive systems easily collapsed in the face of threats induced either from outside or from within. There are several examples of both system in human history which are relevant to the issue being addressed here. We shall take a few examples of both systems and demonstrate the point.

PEOPLE'S DEFENCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPETIVE

In this section, we shall consider the advantages which some communities enjoyed by organizing a people's defence, and the disadvantages others have suffered for not having one. First, let us look at the disadvantages which result from a failure to organize a people's defence. The Moroccan invasion of the Songhai empire in the 16th century is one such case. In this encounter, a Moroccan invading force of 3,000 fighting men was able to defeat a Songhai force that had the superiority of number: it had 18,000 calvary and 9,700 infantry, all armed with swords or spears. That an army of this size could be defeated by a comparatively small force it out-numbered ten to one; can be explained only by factors beyond mere superiority in the weapons of war. As Basil Davidson has rightly argued,

> The nature of warfare has depended upon the nature of
> the human community at any given point; on its social or
> class structure and its mode of government, on its
> economic development and conflicting interests, and on
> its level of culture — using this word 'culture' in a wide
> reference to technological and ideological factors.[3]

The Songhai empire by this period was "the product of a long development of centralizing rule, military control, and the exploitation of peasant labour"[4]. In such a situation, those who had a stake in the system, were usually the 'core people'. And a threat from outside could only lead to defeat because the 'core people' would be left to fight alone. Such was the case for Songhai where

...the nature of the Songhay empire fatally intervened. Seeing the 'core people' in bad trouble, the subject and exploited peoples of the empire rose in revolt. All those who resented having to pay tax or tribute in goods and labour services,... saw the defeat of the Songhay as their chance of liberation or profit.[5]

The same picture is also presented by the way some communities handled the various colonial invasions in Africa. A notable case is the defeat of Chief Nana of Ebrohemi by the Bristish. Nana's defence, seen in terms of the weapons of war and the terrain, were all good and should have enabled him to defeat the British invading force. But to the extent that he lost, can be explained by the fact that his "troops did not have their heart in it when the fighting started. Most were conscripted slaves who evidently saw no sufficient difference between one master and another. They had little desire to fight for Nana".[6] This was the trend of military activity in most African kingdoms at this time where,

Invariably, the Kings and Chiefs went down before colonial power not only because they were weaker in military strength and hitting power, but as much, and sometimes even more, because they were Kings and Chiefs. They fought for interests which the people whom they sent to fight did not sufficiently share: or, in the case of Nana's troops, did not share at all.[7]

A more recent example is the collapse of the Soviet Union into 15 separate republics by 1992. The disintegration of the USSR was relatively rapid, sudden and unexpected. This was especially so given the fact that the USSR was a world superpower armed to the teeth with the most sophisticated weapons available to it to defend itself both from internal and external threats. Despite its awesome military might, and a very centralized government which had always seemed to be in effective control of the whole country, the USSR disintegrated without a single shot fired at it from outside or the people rising against it from within. The USSR fell more because the people would not defend it. The Soviet system became increasingly unable to provide for the welfare of the people, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was virtually turned into a Czarist machine of domination by a minority over the majority. Stalinist authoritarianism which had been masquerading as socialism after the genuine attempt by Lenin to engender socialism, had come to the end of the road. Thus, when the system ran into trouble in the late 1980s, the people were unwilling to defend it. Instead, the CPSU and the bureaucrats were blamed for the mess in which the Soviet Union found itself. There was even a feeling of relief that the regime of the party bosses and bureaucrats was ending and the nation being salvaged. As it turned out, the various republics would emerge as new nations.

However, history is also replete with examples of situations where

people's defence was decisive in preventing defeat. The Chinese had used this to defeat the Japanese invaders as well as to try and transform their country from its semi-colonial status into a powerful socialist society where social defence is at its best.[8]

Another important historical example of the effectiveness of a people's defence system was the Vietnamese war of national liberation. It was a truly people's war fought by the people themselves, organized into "a wide and firm National United Front, comprising all the revolutionary classes, all the nationalities living on Vietnamese soil, all the patriots".[9] The whole people therefore participated enthusiastically in the resistance and made supreme sacrifices for victory to be won. Here again, the key to victory in this war was the participation of the entire people. They were able to defeat an enemy with a greater lethal power than them in this war,

> ...because its political aims were to smash the imperialist yoke in order to win back national independence, to overthrow the feudal landlord class in order to bring land to the peasants; in other words, to radically solve the two fundamental contradictions of Vietnamese society — the contradictions between the nation and imperialism on the one hand, and the contradiction between the people, especially between the peasants and the feudal landlord class, on the other — and to pave the socialist path for the Vietnamese revolution.[10]

From Africa, similar examples abound with the same degree of effectiveness. The people's defence of their nation in Tanganyika against German colonial imposition is a fine example of what a people's defence can achieve. Through the Maji Maji Movement, they successfully fought the Germans from 1905 to 1907. They were defeated not by the German military action, but by famine.[11] In the same vein, the superior (military) might of the Portuguese was defeated by comparably weaker and yet politically superior forces of the *Partido Africano da Independencia da Guinee Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) in Guinea-Bissau, *Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique* (FRELIMO) in Mozambique and the *Moymento Popular de Libertacao de Angola* (MPLA) in Angola. The Portuguese lost because they alienated and antagonized the people through their excessively exploitative and oppressive colonial system. The liberation movements were victorious because they won the hearts and minds of the people. The result was that the people took up arms to liberate themselves.

It is therefore clear from our discussion so far, that it is only when the people have something at stake that they rise to defend their interests, their territory, their nation. Furthermore, a country can only be effectively defended when the masses of the people actively participate in it at whatever level. Also, the people will only rise to defend an order which guarantees for them an enchanced material life free from exploitation and oppression. It follows then, that a social formation in which the mode of production guarantees a maximum material comfort for a small ruling class and at the

same time exploits and brutalizes the majority of the people will not be defended by them. Instead, it will easily crumble under any threat because it does not create a culture of unity. The people have no stake in it and will therefore not defend the privileged position of a few. It also follows that the people will identify with and defend a social formation where the dominant mode of production guarantees for them abundant life and freedom. It is then that we have social defence or a people's defence, and therefore, a national defence. The question then at this stage, and in the light of the discussion so far, is, what is the Nigerian situation like with regard to social defence?

THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

The Nigerian situation presents almost a total absence of social defence or a people's defence in the sense it has been used here. This is related to the dominant mode of production (which is capitalist) in operation in the country today. And, since social defence is inseparably linked to material life, it tends to be determined by the dominant mode of production. The capitalist system which operates in Nigeria today wages a violent war against the majority of Nigerians in all areas of life. It brutalizes them through maximum economic exploitation and severe political oppression. The result is that the people are alienated and marginalized.

The capitalist system has continued to suck Nigeria of all her resources through the multinational corporations, the World Bank and the IMF, and the support of the local *bourgeoisie*. Since flag independence in 1960, the outward flow of the country's resources through high profits repatriated and loot transferred abroad by the local *bourgeoisie*, has increased. The same is not the case with the inward flow of resources. Whatever is earned gets transferred to the capitalist centres of the world through capitalist exploitation and the now perfected art of state robbery which have been unleashed on the country. As the capitalist system gives wealth to small ruling class (both local and foreign) it perpetuates poverty, misery and helplessness for the majority of the people. Moreover, political power is also monopolized by the same ruling class to the exclusion of the majority of the people They have no stake in the system.

The result of this is that life for the majority of the people, has become generally precarious and full of all forms of insecurities. The people have remained poor, unsheltered, diseased, illiterate and exposed to the worst form of indignities. This hardship has been exacerbated by the IMF- imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which continues to sap the people of whatever is left in them. The multinational corporations and banks have continued to declare huge profits even when workers have been massively retrenched. For instance, this can be seen in the performance of the three giant commercial banks. The First Bank of Nigeria saw its profits rise from ₦53.4 million in 1985 to ₦86.6 million in 1986, and ₦106 million in 1989. For the Union Bank, profits after-tax rose from ₦41.5 million in 1985 to ₦53.8 million in 1986, and ₦152.4 million in 1989. While the United Bank for Africa recorded profits of ₦34.1 million in 1985, ₦42.0 million in 1986, and ₦73.6 million in 1987.[12] The unemployment rate is very high and prices have

reached for the sky. Living in Nigeria has become a more dangerous activity because of the inability of most people to meet their most basic needs. As if these conditions have not been harsh enough, the people have had more 'sacrifices' imposed on them through levies, compulsory salary cuts, removal of subsidies, etc. The rural population, 'the neglected majority', has borne more of the brunt of the economic hardship. There is virtual absence of the most basic amenities that form the minimum requirement for life. The people are forced to share the same environment with starvation, ignorance and the oppression of superstition, poverty, and death. The rural development programme is instead consolidating underdevelopment and decay in the rural areas while at the same time making the rich more comfortable.

The cumulative effect of these forces is the dilapidated state of life generally, and the near collapse of the economy. The impact of SAP on the majority of Nigerians has been devastating, and even the government has accepted this. The collapse of the naira has eroded the purchasing power of most Nigerians and their living standard. For instance, Nigeria's GNP *per capita* was twice the average for sub-Saharan Africa, estimated at $760 in 1985. With the sharp fall of the naira since the Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM), *per capita* GNP fell to $230 in 1989, making Nigeria one of the low-income countries in the world (i.e. IDA-eligible). As prices of the most basic necessities soared, earnings have been unable to catch up with them. The hardship has been so severe that there has emerged extremes of wealth and poverty in the society as fewer people became richer and the majority became poorer, while the middle class was wiped out. The social crisis was clearly reflected in the rise in unemployment, rise in violent crimes, brain drain, and collapse of social services such as education and health. For instance, in the area of health, the majority of the population do not benefit from any reasonable health care at all. Hospitals and health centres, where they are available, have ceased to be even 'mere consulting' clinics. Life expectancy is about 49 years, and 10.9% of children die before reaching one year of age. The average calorie in-take is 9% points below FAO's minimum requirement. Only about 28% of the population has access to safe drinking water, and the literacy rate is 34%.[13]

A situation such as the one existing in Nigeria today cannot be defended by the people because they do not identify with it. They have no stake in it because it is the source of their sub-human condition. Rather than defend it, their only interest will be to destroy it. A situation of mutual hostility and conflict prevails between the people and such an exploitative and oppressive system. It is therefore not surprising that whenever this system is under threat from either the people through demands for better wages and living conditions, the return of land stolen from peasants (as in the Bakolori case), or even from violent crimes such as armed robbery, it responds with a defence strategy which relies on the use of military force. Thus, in time of extreme hardship, governments become more repressive and the budget of the military sector also remains high as the Table below clearly shows.

DEFENCE ALLOCATIONS, 1981-89

Year	Total National Expenditure (N)	Defence Expenditure (N)	Defence as % of Total National Expenditure
1981	12,750,017,290	1,319,169,950	10.33
1982	10,946,188,510	1,111,222,790	10.15
1983	10,425,329,930	1,178,925,410	11.07
1984	10,608,130,332	928,274,100	9.27
1985	11,237,808,976	975,650,701	8.66
1986	11,581,732,901	907,058,000	7.83
1987	17,506,929,000	809,797,609	4.63
1988	24,365,266,328	1,270,000,000	5.20
1989	16,971,888,160	1,267,288,410	7.47

Source: Adapted from *SOJA*, Vol. 15, November/December 1989, p.50.

This tendency to rely almost exclusively on force to face any perceived threat only makes for more insecurity in the system. The history of this country since independence amply demonstrates this. As it turns the people into an enemy, it creates more insecurity for itself as they strive to change it because it does not defend their interests. The privileged treatment given to the military sector, often at the expense of the majority of the people, might transform the military personnel into 'mercenaries'. This will consequently weaken the defence system because the military will be more concerned about protecting their privileges rather than risk their lives to defend the system.

It is in this regard that the people are at best indifferent to the security needs of the country, and at worse, try to subvert the basis of such a security system. One might even postulate that if Nigeria as it is today is invaded from outside, the people will not rise up voluntarily to defend her. They are likely to see such a task as that of the military alone. For them, there is nothing to defend since it is not their nation, and they have no stake in it. That is why there is no national unity or cohesion, patriotism, etc., in the country. The basic issue of who 'owns' Nigeria is still unresolved. The people do not see it as theirs yet, and therefore do not think that it is worth defending because it operates against their interests. That is why government has always been alien to them. In such a situation, the country cannot be said to have an effective national defence because there is no social defence. The people are not seen as part of the defence resources of this country whose interests must be protected. So, they do not participate in it, and this makes the national defence system of the country extremely vulnerable. In the light of this, what ought to be the choice for Nigeria?

CONCLUSION: THE CHOICE FOR NIGERIA

As we have argued so far, Nigeria cannot be said to have a national defence unless the people are made to feel that the country belongs to them also. It is the realization that they have something to protect in the country that will make them to rise and defend it. However, we have also argued that this situation is the result of the existing production system. That a production system whose primary purpose is to meet the needs of a minority 'core people' against those of the majority is itself a threat to such a country. While a production system which is geared towards meeting the needs of the people is the surest form of defence for any country.

To this extent, the choice for Nigeria, therefore, is the destruction of the capitalist system and the adoption of the socialist system because, it only, can ensure social defence and therefore national defence. While the capitalist system is anti-people and tends to exploit and oppress them, the socialist system mobilizes the people to defend their interests. The socialist economy ensures equality and freedom for everyone. It eradicates poverty, ignorance, disease and other forms of insecurity by giving the control of the economy to the people. It provides for them in abundance because they control what they produce. Therefore, it is only on such a system that social defence or national defence can be erected.

However, since capitalism will not simply withdraw without a fight, the strategy should be to create a united nationwide organization of all progressive forces such as workers, peasants, students, progressive intellectuals, etc., to dislodge it. This is how the historic victory of the people over the forces of exploitation and oppression was won in places such as China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. It is, therefore, an effective recipe for victory even in the Nigerian situation.

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