

The development of class struggle in Nigeria

An important wave of proletarian struggles developed in Nigeria during July and August 1994. There was an almost uninterrupted succession of strikes and riots. The State finally put an end to the movement by using its usual arsenal of repression. In order to exhaust and then to smash proletarian action, the unions diverted strikes into demands for the replacement of one bourgeois faction by another whilst the police organised more and more widespread arrests.

One of the centres of proletarian agitation was organised around the workers of the petroleum industry. This sector is vital for the national economy, Nigeria representing the fifth largest producer in OPEC, with a production equivalent to that of Kuwait. Strengthened by a long experience of struggle which has regularly manifested itself by strikes and sabotage of production in the Nigerian delta (the main concentration of oil wells, refineries and terminals), the oil workers led a strike which had serious repercussions on the national economy.

This strike constituted an important reaction by our class to the aggression we are subjected to. Moreover, it took place in a country which dominant ideology considers to be "underdeveloped" (with all of this concept's racist undertones, which go as far as denying the existence of proletarians in these countries). Repercussions of the

struggle have affected world market prices; the price of a barrel of oil rocketed due to the standstill of Nigerian refineries and a halt on exports. At the very time that the bourgeoisie was broadcasting, to whoever would listen, that there was "light at the end of the tunnel", that "the end of the recession" had come, that, for the industry, this "cautious recovery" (1) necessitated a growth in primary energy consumption, this movement of struggle shattered the illusions capitalists were using to comfort themselves. The ideologists thought they had buried the proletariat once and for all, and yet here it was, rising in struggle at the heart of Africa.

Let's take this opportunity to show our recognition of the struggle of our proletarian brothers in Nigeria and to emphasise the ever increasing ridiculousness of eurocentrist ideologies which try so hard to deny the proletarian character of such fights. The anti-capitalist action in Nigeria reaffirmed, in practice and with force, the universality of the living and fighting conditions of the world proletariat. It occurred in spite of the bourgeois thesis developed by self-proclaimed "internationalist"

(1) A recovery only made possible as a result of several years of generalised enforcement of austerity measures on the whole worldwide proletariat.

groups, which denigrates workers' struggle when it breaks out anywhere other than in so-called "central industrialised countries". It occurred in spite of the racist and nationalist theses which cannot conceive the proletariat as being anything other than "white", "European" or even "Londoners". It occurred in spite of this eurocentrist vision, which is no more than the negation of proletarian internationalism. In Nigeria, as everywhere else on this bloody planet, our method for imposing our class needs is the same - strikes, riots and attempts to organise the struggle.



Having camouflaged the imperialist interests that gave rise to more than a million deaths in Rwanda, the bourgeoisie has not hesitated to broadcast information concerning the massacres. On the other hand, information on Nigeria was subject to a total blackout - and for a very good reason: the international means of disinformation would much rather shed their crocodile tears in situations where proletarians are undergoing fullscale massacre, than they would wish to dwell on a dangerous example of a determined attempt by our class to assert its own interests through combat.

Every time the proletariat responds with direct action, asserting itself as an autonomous force, the bourgeoisie envelops the emerging struggles, first by total silence and then by a faultless cover-up. This allows a subsequent reduction of such actions to what they never were, for example a "struggle for more democracy"... The proletarian insurrection in Iraq in March 1991 is one remarkable example of what the bourgeoisie is capable of in terms of organised lies (2).

In any case it is certain that the fighting proletariat in Nigeria had absolutely no respect for the rules of the "democratic alternation" so appreciated by the bourgeoisie. Proletarians have set the struggle of class against class in opposition to the choice between "military" and "civilian" government, put forward by the bourgeoisie to justify democracy.

The history of our class, in Nigeria as elsewhere, is marked by numerous struggles, sometimes bloody, in defense of its immediate -and therefore also historical- interests against the sacrifices enforced by the worldwide bourgeoisie. We would like to remind ourselves of some of these struggles before describing the movement that has just taken place.



In 1986 a further step in the deepening of the international economic crisis forced the Nigerian bourgeoisie, as everywhere else, to impose the austerity measures needed for it to withstand international

competition and thus attempt to relaunch its businesses (3). Under the aegis of the IMF, the government tried to enforce a "*structural adjustment programme*", that is to say, an austerity plan involving restructuring, dismissals, wage cuts, etc. Various concrete measures were taken in the years that followed, notably the launching of a "*new industrial policy*" which aimed to achieve "*increased productivity and rationalisation of the public sector*" - in other words, ever increasing misery and sacrifice imposed on proletarians. The following year, not knowing how else to realise its needs, the bourgeoisie concocted a 3-year development plan towards a "*mobile horizon*" (sic!).

Proletarian resistance to these measures was such that the IMF admitted its reluctance to carry on with its loans if there were no "*quick improvements*". In other words, the world State, as always, gave its local lackeys carte blanche to subdue our class. In this situation of unstable social peace, the various bourgeois factions present have to be capable of recognizing which of them is best able to get the bitter pill of austerity swallowed. In Nigeria this task was incumbent upon the "military" bourgeois faction. "*How could a civilian government apply measures of austerity indispensable to the execution of the structural adjustment plan in these conditions?*" wrote the press at the time.

Machine guns and bullets are what Capital holds in store for the proletariat when it starts to fight!

In 1988, in response to an increase in the price of fuel, riots broke out in Jos and Sokoto, which turned out to be the start of more intense waves of struggle. In May and June 1989, several towns such as Lagos, Ibadan, Benin City and Port Harbour revolted against the IMF's plan, resulting in between a hundred and two hundred deaths. "*Army shoots on sight to prevent a generalisation of troubles likely to challenge policies of structural adjustment*" a bourgeois newspaper openly declared. Numerous soldiers came within a hairsbreadth of fraternising with the proletarians. Fearing the persistence of disorder, the bourgeoisie didn't dare increase the price of public tariffs nor decrease subsidies of basic commodities.

In April 1991 new riots broke out in the North, in Kano, Katsina, Bauchi and Lagos. As always, in order to wipe out the clear outline of class war and to prevent this fight from linking up with other moments and places of struggle, the bourgeoisie encouraged the development of inter-ethnic polarisations, a tactic to divide proletarians and, as a result of ensuing micro-nationalisms, to atomize their struggle. The bourgeoisie needs to put us into specific categories, each one having something particular to defend. The bourgeois misinformation expresses this reality ideologically by stressing the definition of each ethnic category and according them marked differences in their political perspectives. The hand is played, the proletariat no longer exists. In the eyes of the media, every social movement is shattered into a mosaic of religious, ethnic, political,... factions. Thus we hear of "muslims in the North", "Christians in the South", "military partisans in the mountains" and "supporters of democratic alternation along the coast". What rubbish!

(2) See also our articles: "War or Revolution" in *Communism* no7, "A comrades' testimony: a journey to Irak" in *Communism* no7 and "Massacre in Halabja" in *Communism* no6.

(3) In the seventies, oil revenue brought in 26 billion dollars to Nigeria. The years of crisis have decreased it 6 billion in 1993.

It is the same interests, antagonistic to those of the hated class, that lead proletarians to fight in the north as in the south. This reality is clearly visible at the heart of the struggle (4). An example was seen at the end of May 1993, when the Emir of Kano (a large industrial centre in the North, "muslim", as the choir of journalists loves to keep on chanting!) was stoned by proletarians from a very poor neighbourhood during the sacrosanct procession of Sallah, the Festival of Sacrifice. This no doubt did the Emir some harm, but also put the fables about the religiousness of the region's proletarians and their supposedly different resultant interests into perspective.

In May 1992, at the same time as proletarians were invading the streets of Los Angeles, USA, new riots broke out all over Nigeria. The reasons: a devaluation of the Nigerian currency by 70% and a serious fuel shortage which sent the prices of public transport sky high. Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Port Harbour, Benin City, Abuja,... were in revolt. The unions only succeeded in restoring calm several days later and with the help of the army's ferocious repression.



In June and July 1993, confronted with an unprecedented crisis and the proletarians' dissatisfaction, amplified as a consequence of a further devaluation, the bourgeoisie was dreading an explosion of more troubles. In the face of rising tensions, the government threatened to declare a state of emergency. The "international community" - that is to say the World State of Capital - was extremely worried about the situation. If proletarian struggle were to set Nigeria ablaze, the movement could reverberate, like a shock wave, through neighbouring countries, a catastrophe for the world bourgeoisie. To convince oneself of this, it's enough to remember the importance of the interests at stake for the large petroleum companies such as Elf Aquitaine (France), Occidental Petroleum (USA), Shell (Anglo-Dutch), throughout practically the whole of Black Africa.

It was in this context of growing social instability that the local bourgeoisie performed its hackneyed old election trick,

organising presidential elections on the 12th June 1993. In a spectacular show, closely followed by the media, the "military" bourgeois faction's candidate, General Babandiga, was set against his "civilian" opposition, the millionaire Moshod Abiola, candidate of the "Social-Democratic Party". In an attempt to maximise votes in the decaying, but highly populated, suburbs of the cities, Abiola centred his electoral campaign on the populist theme of "goodbye to poverty". Why not "let's all become millionaires" while we are at it?! As if the bourgeoisie had anything other than misery to offer us!

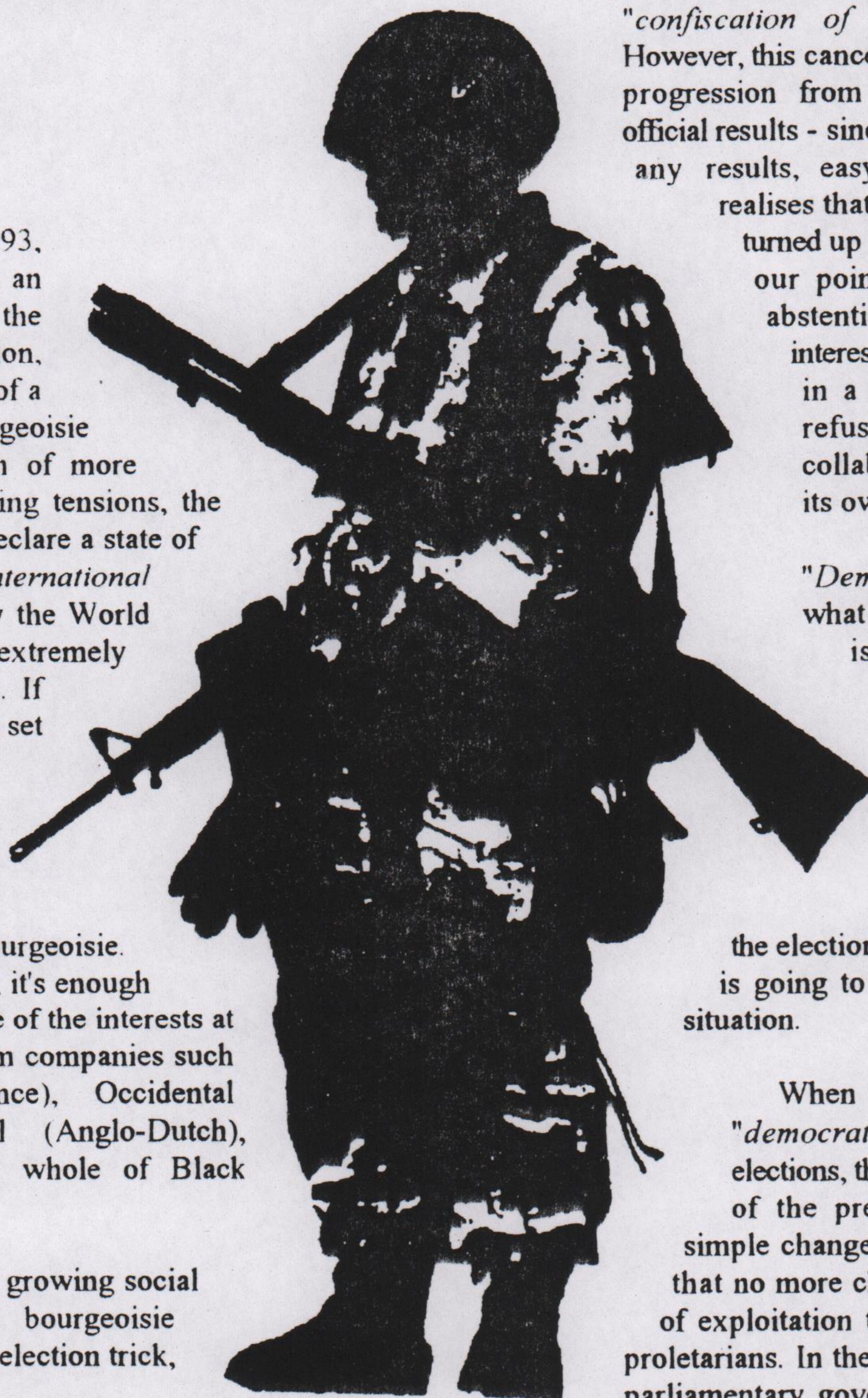
These elections were an out and out failure for all bourgeois factions. The turnout was very poor at support meetings organised by the "military" faction in Kano, Kaduna and Katsina (a region traditionally presented as one of its strongholds). On the 23rd of June, the "military" faction cancelled the elections and published a press release justifying the halt to the "democratic process" in order to "avoid ridiculing the country's legal and judiciary system".

The scandalised "civilians" denounced the "confiscation of the democratic process". However, this cancellation was merely a logical progression from their inability to publish official results - since it was an election without any results, easy to appreciate when one realises that only 30% of the population turned up to the polling stations. From our point of view, a 70% level of abstention is always of relative interest and expresses, even if only in a very passive way, a certain refusal by the proletariat to collaborate with the construction of its own misery.

"Democratic process" or not, what the proletariat is looking for is a profound transformation of its conditions of existence. Its life is a hell permanently fuelled by the obligation to work to survive, its life a non-life, and it is certainly not the election of a new administrator that is going to change anything about the situation.

When the bourgeoisie talks about "democratic process", demanding free elections, the respect of Rights, freedom of the press etc, it is referring to a simple change in the form of government that no more challenges the administration of exploitation than it does the situation of proletarians. In the context of Nigeria, it was a parliamentary government that gave way to a Bonapartist government. Democracy, as we

have explained several times before, is merely the expression of a market reality which claims that there are no proletarians nor bourgeois in the world of Economy but only buyers and sellers of commodities. In this way, one of the most profound resolutions of democracy is to recruit



(4) It is obvious that dominant ideology is using the present international weakness shown by the proletariat in its assertion of its communist perspectives to generalise myths about the disappearance of class struggle and the non-existence of the proletariat. As always, ideology gathers its information from limited and superficial aspects of reality.

proletarians (negated as such) and to turn them into responsible citizens (that is to say either silent citizens or ones who regurgitate the speeches of those who dominate), either by force... or by way of the vote. The vote itself expresses little more than docility with regard to the system set up to exploit the proletariat. The important thing for the bourgeoisie is that every citizen participates in the elections and, in doing so, becomes dependent on his vote. If he is not happy, he just needs to choose a better administrator next time. The parliamentary game can only function with the participation of a majority of individualised proletarians, an a-classist concept, if such a thing exists.

If, as has been the case in Nigeria, a general refusal to participate in this circus is expressed, it falls on the most suitable bourgeois faction, be it unionist, military, religious or other, to take things into hand. It is of little importance to capital whether its administrators are "civilian" or "military", as long as its administrative requirements are met. It's obvious that each type of government (whether parliamentary or Bonapartist) has both advantages and drawbacks and is never purely "civilian" or "military". Predominantly parliamentary governments (classified along with "civilian" government) clearly do not mind imposing austerity measures or even organising "coups". Similarly, the more Bonapartist governments (classified along with "military" government) are quite prepared to play the voting game as long as it makes their task easier. It all depends upon how much room for manoeuvre the ruling faction of the time has at its disposal, which itself depends upon the social situation.

We therefore see how these types of governments alternate: when one loses its credibility, the other can take its place and vice-versa. But whatever form a government takes, it's always the need for capital's administration that predominates in this choice, even if it's the balance of force between classes that finally imposes one or other form of government on the bourgeoisie. *"The halt of the democratic process"*, as evoked in the Nigerian Generals' communique, merely expresses this passage from one form of government to another. The "civilians" demand to *"restart the democratic process"* is actually just a spare fuse, to keep in reserve, lest the "military" fail to bring the situation under control.(5).

At the end of June, the agitation became more extensive again, in several cities in the south-west, proletarians erected barricades to confront the forces of order. In Ibadan, proletarians **attacked the prison** and freed hundreds of prisoners. In Lagos, they **devastated the trade union headquarters** as a protest against the cancellation of the general strike.

On the 5th, 6th and 7th of July, whilst Abiola and his gang were declaring themselves winners of the election and calling for people to put their trust in them, the proletariat took to the streets. Riots and looting broke out. In Lagos, the government showed itself incapable of pushing back the rioters who were crossing the district, pillaging everything as they went. Young proletarians descended from the

suburbs to the town centre, erecting barricades, burning cars and **attacked the Central Bank of Nigeria**, as well as several supermarkets. Many cops were killed. The insurgents held the main roads of the city as well as the bridges and attacked military convoys to get hold of weapons and set fire to army vehicles. The government responded by sending in the army. But, as in 1989, even the heart of the army itself was bursting with internal dissent. Was it to be mutiny, defeatism or further inter-bourgeois polarisations? To this day, very few details have reached us but it is clear that the social contradictions at the very heart of the army motivated this "dissent".

In the weeks that followed, "civilians" and the "military" negotiated with a view to forming a government of national union. However, the "military" faction did not believe that the "civilians" would be capable of managing the social situation. During the whole of August, the "civilian" fraction tried, with the unions, to prove itself. The agitation continued to grow and the workers of the petrol industry triggered strike after strike, notably in the Port Harcourt refinery, pulling in the Kaduna refinery in their wake, which also had to stop momentarily. Nevertheless, after eight years of good and loyal services, General Babandiga gave up his place to a civilian government in a **gesture of appeasement and social pacification**.

One of the problems confronting the administrators of capital during these strikes was obviously how to maintain profits drawn from the exploitation of petrol workers. As a result of the class struggle, major fuel shortages disrupted the supply routes which, in turn, had a negative affect on other sectors of the economy. On the other hand, the government was forced into making petrol subsidies of 95%, in an attempt to prevent further social explosions, and it was only supposed to cost 0,70 Naira (0,15 FF) at the pump. However this decision, resulting from proletarian struggle, yielded little return for the capitalists. As a consequence, fuel was sent to neighbouring countries instead where it was sold for between 2,6 and 4 FF, that is 17 to 26 times more expensive. Thus, a third of Nigerian fuel was exported, leading to rises in local prices due to shortages and increasing demand. The bourgeoisie tried to explain the price rises as being related to episodes of corruption, amongst other things, but the reality of the problem was clear: how to increase fuel prices without risking a social explosion ?

In November 93, as the "civilian" government decided on new fuel price increases of 700% to 900% the struggle became stronger than ever. The unions jumped onto the bandwagon during the general strike organised by proletarians, which largely hit major industrial cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja,... In the Lagos suburbs, groups of young proletarians confronted the police and the army in violent clashes. Recognising its inability to bring the social agitation under control, the "civilian" government was forced to resign. The situation was taken in hand by the "military" faction under the leadership of General Sanni Abacha. Before they were able to gain sufficient reinforcement by spreading more widely, the strikes were smashed by force: *"the country could no longer put up with the dislocation and the destruction of its economy"* the "new" rulers declared.

(5) On the question of democracy, refer to our article "Against the myth of democracy and liberty" published in *Communism* no 8.

That was the position at the end of 1993. The "military" silenced all demands and proletarian struggle appeared to have been crushed by the new government's iron grip.



But Capital cannot smother the embers of a smouldering social fire indefinitely. The struggles that broke out during July and August 1993 expressed, as we stressed above, the maturing of a process in which the proletariat continued to assert its class interests against all bourgeois factions, each one of them as discredited as the last.

As far as we know, these struggles regained strength at the beginning of June 1994, as riots broke out in several Lagos suburbs. Again, barricades were erected and important communication routes cut off, thus blocking all free circulation of goods. This arm-wrestling match with the proletariat had now gone on for several years and the bourgeoisie attempted to break it by once again playing its old card of "democratic alternation."

In the middle of June, the "democratic opposition" organised a campaign bringing together "responsible citizens against the military regime", in an attempt to put their leader back in the saddle, the millionaire (as ever) Abiola. They also organised a week of "civil disobedience" which culminated in "dead town" days, caricatures of "barricade days" (sic) and other "days of prayer". But generally in Nigeria, as in Zaire and elsewhere in Africa, all such attempts at large mobilisation by opposition bourgeois factions gain very little support.

From the 4th of July 1994, the strike movement was, once again, broadened by the appearance of the petrol workers onto the scene. In the defence of their interests, they developed social confrontation throughout the country and at all levels of production. In this sector the State structures itself around powerful unions, true spearheads of the counterrevolution: the NUPENG (National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers) and the PENGASSAN (Union of the Petroleum Industry Managers). Concerned to avoid being overtaken by proletarians organising in an autonomous way, the unions were forced to ease up on the pressure and to try to take the lead of the struggle by declaring an "unlimited strike", which was, in any case, inevitable. Therefore, on the 12th of July, the main trade union headquarters (National Labour Congress - NLC) recognised the general strike, realising that it is far better to be integrated into a strike and take over its leadership, i.e. sabotage it, than it is to be overtaken by the struggles. The trade unions tried to transfer class opposition from the social terrain on which it was placed (demands for higher wages, struggles against misery, unemployment,...)

to a strictly political terrain by advocating the replacement of one bourgeois faction by another, the "military" by the "civilians". But the strike paralysed all activity in Lagos and other large cities. Simultaneously, there was a full scale reinforcement of repression. While the workers of the Warri petrochemical plant were subjected to a lock-out, the fuel shortage paralysed the whole country. Bloody riots broke out on the 18th of July in Lagos and Ibadan, proletarians from suburban slums again coming out onto the streets. There were more than twenty casualties, amongst them several cops beaten to death. At Port Harcourt, one of the country's largest refineries, the consequences of the strike were such that the minister of petrol stated that it would take several months to resolve all the resultant technical problems.

On the 21st July, the unions call for a return to work was met by a multiplication of strikes and demonstrations, the proletariat enforcing the maintenance of the strike. Further riots broke out in Lagos on the 26th and strikers imposed an immediate halt of all production and trade by force. Street fights with Capital's mercenaries turned into a pillage of the commercial centre. At the end of the month, the unions warned the petrol companies of the risks of sabotage if their bosses were to continue to employ scabs. These scabs, largely composed of retired and expat workers, American and European engineers amongst them, were badly beaten up by the strikers. The unions had to admit that they were no longer in control of their "base".

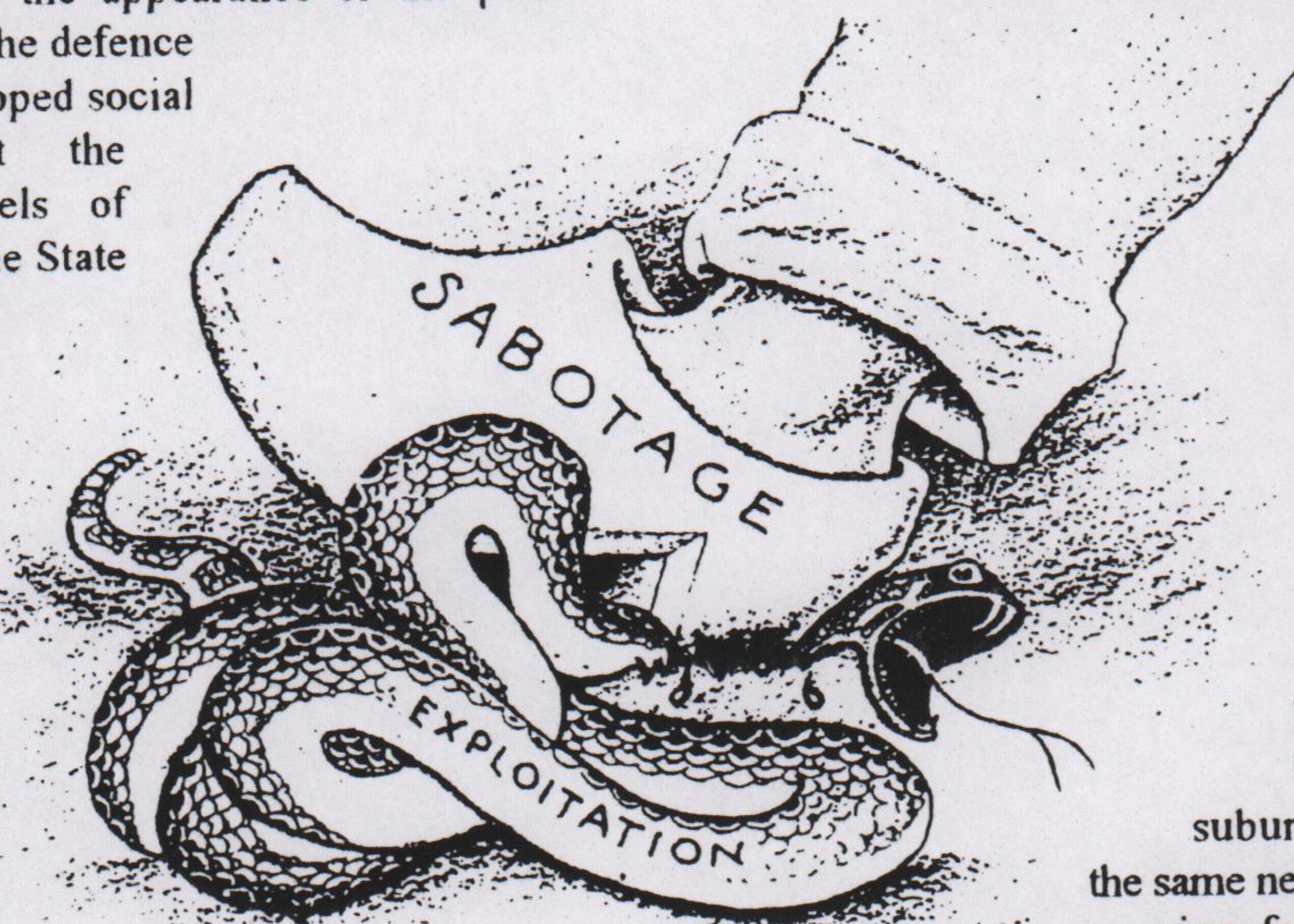
At the beginning of August, after a month of strike, the world bourgeoisie started to worry about the soaring prices of a barrel of petrol on the world markets. Once again it was the persistence of social troubles that forced the State, by way of the unions, to take measures to bring the violent attacks of the proletariat down to the level of negotiable demands. On the 3rd of August, the NLC

declared a further "general strike" and tried to reduce the proletarian movement to a reasonable protest, taking national interests into consideration. But once again, groups of organised proletarians went beyond this farce of a general strike and turned it into a real social clash expressed by arson, looting, barricades, etc in several

suburbs of Northern Lagos. In the same neighbourhoods the previous evening, food trucks had already been plundered by groups of "young

troublemakers" and their contents immediately distributed to "passers-by" (media quote!). Seeing the situation taking a turn for the worse, the social firemen (i.e. the unions) decided to try some damage limitation and called for a return to work. This appeal, as those before it, proved fruitless.

As a result of these proletarian reactions, the entire national economy was badly hit. In Lagos, power cuts became more and more frequent, public transport practically non-existent and electricity plants came to a halt due to the



lack of fuel. On the 5th of August, the Port Harcourt refineries had to close down again due to the strike. On the 8th, Shell announced a suspension of its crude oil exports due to damages inflicted on an important pipeline "in the context of the strike".

In order to force the proletarians back to work, the government had to purge its own institutions. On the 17th of August, it decided to dissolve three of the main unions that had proved incapable of taking the lead in the proletarian struggle and transforming it into a reasonable movement. This measure, no matter how spectacular it might seem, was merely a simple and temporary sanction in order to facilitate a future recredibilisation of these unions.

Simultaneously, the bourgeois toughened up their tone and threatened that *"any further act of vandalism against strategic installations of the country will be promptly and firmly repressed"*. These threats signified not only a confession by the bourgeoisie that they were in danger, but also clearly confirmed their need to go on the offensive. A few hours later, as demonstrations broke out in Kaduna (the major commercial centre in the north) and Benin City, violent confrontations took place between the strikers and the army, which had been deployed in strategic areas of these cities. However, Shell had to announce the closure of the Forcados petrol terminal (one of its most important) due to sabotage of its installation.

Despite the threats of dismissal, lock-outs, use of scabs, repression, arrests, there was not an immediate return to

work, the petrol workers' strike continuing. It took the government **two and a half weeks** to take the situation in hand and force the proletarians back to the industrial prisons. By the 26th of August all large public enterprises (petrol sector, electricity company, etc.) had been militarized. The army took on the task of mass delivery of fuel necessary for the recovery of production and petrol stations across the entire country were forcibly resupplied. On the 29th of August, the army occupied Warri and Port Harcourt. By the 5th of September, it appeared that the strike had been smashed - in any case the restocking of petrol continues. Since then there has been a news black out, with no further information available, other than that order supposedly reigns and repressive measures have been intensified.



What conclusions can we draw from all of this?

Firstly, we can only comment once again on the appalling lack of accurate information outside the channels organised by the bourgeois media; we can only comment upon the critical absence of international and internationalist networks for proletarian centralisation.

We wanted to write this text in order to circulate the little information we have on the situation of our class brothers in Nigeria. However, for the most part, this information has been gleaned from bourgeois newspapers. We are aware that aspects relating to the organisation and continuity of



struggle, demonstrations of proletarian violence, confrontation against the unions etc, are (when they are mentioned at all) completely distorted by the journalists' submissive point of view, as they are unable to venture beyond the narrow framework of the dominant ideology they are serving. There has not even been a mention of the existence of organised minorities, of leaflets from our class, of texts detailing the rupture with democratic ideology or of demonstrations of proletarian solidarity. These facts are simply not reported because they do not fit into the framework of the democratic ideology conveyed by the international media.

In short, we have no illusions about information gathered from our enemies. On this basis, it is true that the almost total non-existence of our own class structures is undeniably an expression of our weakness and demonstrates the balance of forces in the bourgeoisie's favour.

What kind of organisations arose from these years of struggle in Nigeria? What slogans/watchwords have emerged? What practical lessons did our class draw from its experience? To this day there are so many questions that remain unanswered.

At the present time, we do not have enough elements to analyze, in any depth, the levels of proletarian rupture that were expressed in these struggles, particularly as far as the existence, permanent or not, of organised minorities is concerned. However, we have no doubt that workers groups were able to and/or will be able to emerge, in the light of all those years of social agitation. We also know that direct action took place on many different occasions and that there was frequent sabotage in support of the strikes. This is surely a sign of the existence of levels of workers' organisation, even if these actions remained limited in their aims, in time as well as in space.

The organised paralysis of the National Electricity Company and the degree of structure that this implied is an example of the existence of such levels of organisation.

We know very well that the the proletarians who instigated these actions have suffered terrible repression, some militant workers have received sentences ranging from ten years in prison to the death sentence. However, it is clear that the way has been opened up and initiatives accomplished for the structuring of proletarians and that those minorities who organised themselves actively to develop the strikes will constitute -if this isn't already the case today- nuclei for the international organisation of the proletariat.

We can also conclude that despite all the weaknesses still present in our class, the bourgeoisie had major difficulties in cooling down the situation and had to use every trick at its disposal: trade unions, left-wing/right-wing polarisation, elections, but also and especially, open repression through arrests, liquidation of proletarians and widescale military deployment. As in Algeria in 1988, armed repression appears to have been the most effective method.

Yet in Niger a, there are no indications that the movement is dead. This is what is most astonishing compared to the rehearsals of "scenes" of struggle in most other countries, over the last few years. Throughout the world, proletarians

destroy, burn, reappropriate commodities, kill a few cops, sabotage... occupy the streets and violently confront all machineries of the state, but the continuity and homogeneity of their actions and their generalisation often seem very precarious. Once the struggles have been smashed it is very rare to see demonstrations of class solidarity and organisation survive.

It seems that this has not been the case in Nigeria. Since 1988, every attempt to violently bring the proletarians back on the path to democracy has ended in a revival of the struggle. Whether faced with promises of free elections by the "civilians" or truncheon blows by the "military", proletarians have reacted with strikes, sabotages and pillages, thus demonstrating, by the systematisation of attacks against the whole State machinery, a continuity in the struggle which contrasts somewhat with the general characteristics of today's struggles (6).

We will end by stressing, once again, the common character of the universal response by proletarians in the face of the permanent degradation of their living conditions.

Against all illusionists who shout that the classes are dead and that class struggle no longer exists, against all those who lecture that Europe is the centre of the world, against those who try to divide us by emphasizing the particularities of our living conditions according to which latitudes we struggle in, we reassert that everywhere on this planet we are fighting the same enemy. The proletariat has to confront the same armies, the same unions, the same media, the same democrats, the same priests etc, all over the world.

We will respond to the HOMOGENEITY of our ever-increasingly deplorable survival conditions by UNITY of proletarian reaction!

★ September 1994 ★



FROM 'COMMUNISM' NO. 7.

(6) See also our text "General characteristics of the struggles of the present time" in this issue.

In the Collective Agreement between Keydrill Nigeria Limited and NUPENG, the company listed some of the "covert forms of resistance and protest" as including theft or fraud, sleeping on duty, possessing, using or being under the influence of intoxicants or narcotics, absenteeism, wastage of materials, sabotage and use of 'dirty language' and malicious damage of company property,... not mentioning the company vehicles set on fire, the cranes turned over, the graffiti painted on the walls, the keys to premises get lost or the radios on the rigs get damaged. Any worker found guilty of any of the above offences would be summarily dismissed without advance notice.

All the service companies complained of destruction and wastage of company property by "ghost workers" leading to thousands of naira.

"It is difficult to provide accurate statistics. But even in this service company, we have had several experiences of workers deliberately destroying our property. Most of them are heartless people who can set rigs on fire. Hence we don't take chances. At the slightest indication of discontent, we move to nip such actions by 'unknown' workers in the bud. But definitely, wastage of food and raw material on the rig, deliberate pollution in order to place oil-producing communities and the company at logger-heads, and damaging of company property have been employed in the past to put pressure on the company."

There is a case of a service company at Warri which imported a machine estimated to cost 1.8 million naira. This machine would have rendered a lot of service men, welders, supervisors, fitters, etc. jobless. Within a week workers practically dismantled the machine. They stole the parts and dumped them into the sea. Till this day, the machine lies idle in the company's premises.

A proletarian song:

"Oyel work no good.

Dem no dey take oyel cook soup.

Na who de drink oyel, who sai?

Oyimbo palava plenty pass oyel.

Dem want big work but dem no want give money.

Baboon dey chop, monkey dey work"

☛ Oil job is no good. Who can make soup with oil? Who can drink oil? Impossible! The white man's trouble is more than oil. They want us to work hard but don't want to pay us well. The rich consume while the poor works....

"It was at the drinking bar on Warri-Sapale road that a friend told me how he had tampered with the food supplies and refrigerator on his rig. He did it because the food was bad and the company initially was fond of serving a lot of non-African food. He is a cook, so I spoke to a friend of mine in our company who is a cook and we planned our own. Almost everyone on the rig became sick. We added some sweet tasting native leaves to the food which caused some mild diarrhoea and stomach ache. Everyone complained of the food. It almost cost the cook his job, but since we had complained before, this provided a chance for renewing the complaints with evidence. It worked. We started getting fresh supplies flown daily, no more salads and bread but genuine Nigerian foods. If we had relied on wringing letters, we would be far from our goals today."

Drivers in oil companies also related several experiences: remove car plugs, deflate tires or claim that cars intended to take manager's representatives to collective bargaining places could not start. They can take longer routes or just take routes known to "have frequent go-slow". The end result is that the management's representatives arrive late or fail to get there and the union declares them unserious and calls a strike.

Petrol tanker drivers can delay on the way to delivery or even sell petrol along the way to roadside dealers:

"To many people, petrol tanker drivers are thieves who sell petrol to illegal dealers. They constitute a threat to other road users with their monster tankers. But none of them has ever driven a tanker, over long distances, night and day, without rest. In any case, whatever we do is in aid of survival, which the companies and government (are) not interested in. The bigmen want petrol to drive their big long cars but do not care what happens to we 'mekunu' (the poor). If I have the chance to sell the petrol and the tanker, I will do it any day. That will be my share of the oil boom."

In 1985, the Nigerian government passed new decrees prescribing the firing squad for those who sabotage petroleum pipelines or engage in illegal bunkering of oil. The NNPC extended its efforts to control bunkering in order to bring more revenues.

All these quotes and excerpts come from "Resistance and hidden forms of protest amongst the petroleum proletariat in Nigeria" by J.O. Jhonvbere published by Midnight Notes in "Midnight Oil". As the publisher puts it: the work is derived from data collected from the field work carried out in Lagos, Warri and its environs between May 1983 and April 1985.