Niger: neocolonial heart of Africa

Niger is a little-known country. It is located in the central part of Africa, more than 700 kilometers from the sea. It is bordered by Mali, Algeria, Libya, Chad, Nigeria, and Upper Volta.

The 1188,000 square kilometers with insufficient water supply and influenced by the climate of the Sahara (2/3 of its territory falls within the sands of the Sahara), weigh heavily on an almost primitive agricultural economy, with 95% of its labor force working in agriculture. With 675% of its foreign trade in the hands of French companies, its main economic sectors controlled by foreign monopolies.

Niger, which, in 1960 became a nominally independent republic, languished in misery, without plans or prospects.

The discovery of a 340 sq. km. 20,000 ton layer of uranium reserve surprisingly brought to light the plans of the French Atomic Energy Commission, but the prospects for the people of Niger appear more somber than ever: reinforcement of the France-Niger military collaboration, greater economic and political dependence...

For the 3,000,000 inhabitants of Niger, who in 1964 had scarcely 50 doctors, 2 hospitals and 60 dispensaries, while there were only 20 students (for all the bargains of the economy) in the foreign universities, the plan of the local administration of Diôr is to present as the salvation of the country, have very little value.

What prospects can the 195 students who graduate from the Teachers School offer to the 34,000 (of the 500,000 school age children) who attend school (6.9%) — the lowest percentage in Africa?

What prospects, finally, can be offered by the neocolonial administrators represented in the person of Hamani Diôr?

Diôr, the president of Niger and one of the principal Francophiles in Africa, upon proclaiming Niger’s independence, militated in the Niger section (Niger Progressive Party — PPPN) of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), the regional organization that preceded the national liberation movement in the name known as West Africa and French Equatorial Africa.

In 1958 the French forces of repression removed the legal government of Djibo Bakay and installed a puppet government representing the foreign interests, headed by Hamani Diôr. The Diôr regime suppressed freedom of expression, of assembly, of trade union and political organization.

Faced with this, the UDN, which, later took the name of Swaha (freedom), set itself the task of forming a union with the revolutionary forces to confront the reactionary line of the right wing of the RDA. In this manner, united with the BNA (Bloc Nigerien d’Action), together constituting the Mouvement Socialiste Africain (MSA), they then joined the national organization (PRA), Parti du Rassemblement Africain.

At the same time indiscriminate repression was begun against the Swaha, which was made Illegal in 1959. From then on savage repression has been on those who try to express their hostility to the regime. Especially during 1964 and 1965, crimes such as public executions, hanging, patricular assassinations, and rape have been daily occurrences.

On his part, Diôr has tried to consolidate his political positions: Balancing the Marxist-Leninist and Upper Volta were united in the Council of the Empire. In 1963 he signed an accord with France by means of which French troops could operate freely in the country. French officers would serve as “advisors” to their Nigerian colleagues and the troops evacuated from Upper Volta and Mali would be brought to this desert country. At the same time it has had the support of the United States, which has provided a great quantity of arms and munitions, while it has asked Israel to send military instructors.

Since then two parties and two positions have been defined: The Union for the French African Community (U.A.C.), the name that the PPN acquired to point out its role as principal agent of the French interests in the country; the MSA, directed by Diôr and Haman.

Diôr and his parts represent neocolonialism in Niger, although they demagogically try to hide this.

The Swaha Party stands for real change in the country; thus Bakay declared: “The social structure of Niger would be favorable to the development of a socialist revolution, because apart from a handful of well-to-do individuals, the rest of the population is made up of peasant masses who have nothing to lose.”

In order to better organize the country’s struggle, Swaha created the Democratic Front of the Fatherland, open to all true patriots of the nation, and with a nationalist and democratic program.

In the political sphere, the program fundamentally advocates effective, sovereign and complete independence, which among other things amounts to the withdrawal of French troops stationed in Niger; the re-establishment of the basic liberties; the
adoption of a political line tending toward a true union of the African peoples; the practice of an independent international policy and the adoption of the principles of neutrality; and the construction of a government of national unity, representative of all the categories of the country.

Economically: plans for the application of a policy of planned development, and the elimination of all French economic enterprises; the withdrawal of the interna
tional economic bodies that signify a limitation of Niger's freedom of action; development of foreign trade and commercial relations with all the African states; exploitation of the natural resources of Niger, and basically the rational development and exploitation of the agricultural reserves based on the egalitarian distribution of the land that would facilitate agrarian reform.

Finally the Sawaha sets forth a broad program of health education, and of the recuperation of the culture and art of the different ethnic groups that live in Niger.

But a program of Socialism Revolutionism, as is set out by the Sawaha, will take power with difficulty without having dislodged the great foreign exploitative companies.

And in Niger the people had the experience of a party (Sawaha) that had leaders in power—although only formally—whio were expelled by the reactionaries supported by the old settlers. These leaders were persecuted and assassinated, only for trying to initiate their own policy.

Later, in 1955 when they organized themselves militarily for the struggle against Diou and his “advisers,” the latter unfolded the greatest repressive violence of which they were capable.

That guerrilla group was momentarily defeated. There followed in Niger the misery and lack of prospects for the people under the administration of Diou or others like him.

The patriots of Niger know this, but they know as well that through the defeats there is forged a final triumph: and that is that for them what has passed is part of a struggle that can only be stopped by victory. Today Niger is among the peoples conscious of the necessity of waging armed struggle until they achieve their complete liberation.

letters to the ospaaal

EXPERIENCES FOR OTHER PEOPLES

I have read an interesting article in your last bulletin about the counter-insurgency practices of the U.S. and the utilization of the North American universities and scientific institutions for the perfection of armaments and methods of the imperialist war.

Faced with this increase of U.S. militarism for the purpose of repressing the patriotic movements of our poor and oppressed countries, we believe the propaganda work carried out by that organ of the Tricontinental is very efficacious.

Therefore, it made us very happy to receive the last issues which contained reports of the guerrillas of Colombia, Viet-Nam, Angola, Mozambique and Korea. In addition, the small size of your bulletin makes it easier for me to bring it to my classmates in the University.

We believe that the propaganda of those who struggle against the Yankees should serve as an exchange of experiences among revolutionaries, to expose the repressive methods and tactics utilized by the enemy. Also, it must be said how these methods are destroyed and ridiculed by the actions of the guerrilla combatants and the armed city commandos of the various countries, Viet-Nam, with its heroic example, is a beautiful wealth of accumulated experiences for other peoples.

Here in Santo Domingo we confront the repressive forces in the streets and in addition we are prepared each day to give the Yankee who invaded our country his just deserts. We know that the struggle is long and hard but we have confidence in the heroic tradition of our people.

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