

The Military and Civil Society in Sierra Leone: The 1992 Military Coup d'Etat¹.

C Magbaily Fyle*

Résumé: Cet article porte sur une analyse du coup d'Etat militaire survenue en Sierra Leone et des raisons qui l'ont motivé. Pour l'auteur, les origines du coup d'Etat sont à chercher dans les programmes et politiques du gouvernement en place avant le coup d'Etat. Il analyse le double processus de l'incorporation systématique de l'élite militaire du gouvernement dans la politique par le biais de la corruption, d'avantages indus et de postes politiques. Même s'il faut reconnaître que le coup d'Etat était bien accueilli, les efforts fournis avaient marginalisé et appauvris les jeunes officiers. L'article fait état des problèmes et des erreurs du régime et les analyse par rapport au développement historique de la Sierra Leone.

After 23 years of rule by the All People's Congress (APC) party, Sierra Leone had a new military government chaired by Captain Valentine Strasser, following a putsch at the end of April 1992. There have been varied reactions to this military coup and its executors — the new leaders of Sierra Leone. This paper attempts to place this coup squarely in the context of a transitional phase of political change in Sierra Leone, viewing it in relation to earlier military coup d'Etats and civil/military relations in the lengthy period of APC rule.

The Military and Politics

The analysis of the military and politics in this essay will concern itself primarily with civil/military relations, described by Cox (1976) as military intervention representing no more than a special variation in a broader theme of political instability.

Decalo (1976) discusses two schools of thought on military intervention in politics. The one view identifies the most important causes of military intervention in politics (as) not military, but political and reflect not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of society.

Africa Development Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 1994, pp127-146

1 I want to thank Drs. John Conteh-Morgan and Max Dixon-Fyle for their comments on the first draft.

The other perspective attributes to military hierarchies certain characteristics of professionalism, nationalism; cohesion and austerity that impel them to move into the political arena and to rescue the state from the grip of corrupt and self-sustaining political elites (Decalo 1976:12).

It may not mean that these two views are mutually exclusive, for the desire of soldiers to bring order into society may reflect the weak political and institutional structures which have proved inadequate for advancing these multi-ethnic societies, and which have made possible widespread corruption.

The Military and Political Change in Sierra Leone

Military coups are not new to Sierra Leone. Bebler (1973) discusses the 1967 military coup as an attempt to restore an unpopular government which had just lost the elections. In reality, there were two military coups in quick succession in 1967. The first coup by the force commander, Brigadier John Lansana in March 1967, fits Bebler's analysis. But three days later, other senior officers of the army reacted to Lansana's coup by ousting the force commander, this time not to pursue the results of the elections, but to set up a military junta, the National Reformation Council (NRC). They invited one of their members, then on study leave, A T Juxon-Smith, to return and head the new NRC. Interestingly enough, the leading officers who overthrew Lansana, Majors Blake, Kai Samba and Jumu, were all, like Lansana and the government he was trying to reinstate, 'southerners', reflecting ideological rather than ethnic differences in the counter-coup.

This military government lasted for a year. The welcome by the populace of the second coup wore out as the martial attitude of Juxon-Smith alienated the middle class. But the reason for the overthrow of the NRC by a non-southern led coalition of army officers of the warrant officer class in April 1968, had little to do with the middle class. The senior officer cadre of the army, now the political leaders, basking in popularity and obvious affluence ... neglected the lot of their junior officers (Fyle 1981). Thus the NRC was overthrown and the warrant officers quickly invited John Bangura, a former senior army officer retired by the previous civilian government, to return and head the army. Bangura decided to follow the results of the elections of a year earlier and hand over power to the winners, the APC led by Siaka Stevens. While ethnicity cannot be entirely ruled out in this transition, the handing over of power by John Bangura, a Temne, to Siaka Stevens, a Limba, could still be interpreted as entrenching northern interests, a factor we will return to presently.

Siaka Stevens and the Military

This transition to civilian rule ushered in a seventeen year period of virtually personal rule by Siaka Stevens which involved political changes leading to a

republic and executive presidency in 1971, and a one-party government in 1978. The problem of course remained which Hutchful (1990) addressed, namely that military rule has the tendency to produce insecure civilian successor regimes who come to power invariably lacking clear assurance of military support and perception of how to deal with military issues.

Siaka Stevens solution to this problem was what has been described by Mac Dixon-Fyle (1989) as 'dyarchy', interpreted in this context as limited incorporation of the military top brass into the political system. In 1974, Siaka Stevens got the constitution altered by incorporating the head of the army, Brigadier Joseph Momoh, and more symbolically, that of the Police, as members of parliament of cabinet rank. This military-in-politics process was maintained until the military coup of 1992.

In addition to this dyarchy, Stevens instituted, in 1973, a Cuban trained para-military force, the Internal Security Unit (ISU) (later named the Special Security Division, SSD), the intention being to raise ... a veritable counterpoise to the regular army (Dixon-Fyle 1989:214). The reality was that Stevens kept the army largely unarmed for fear of their staging a coup d'état. The military elite, which was now virtually part of the civilian government, enjoying lavish perks and kickbacks like their civilian counterparts, was in charge of the arms depot, kept under tight security.²

Expenditure on the ISU/SSD increased substantially after 1974 and it was this force that was used to fight elections and return APC candidates into office, as well as terrorize elements of the population which manifested public protest likely to threaten the survival of the government. When students of Fourah Bay College protested against President Stevens, who was also chancellor of the University at Convocation in January 1977, the government could not use legal means to incarcerate the students because the judiciary would not cooperate. An ISU led group of APC supporters was sent to bust up the college three days later (Fyle 1981:143).

Stevens continued to work the tightrope between the military, obviously piqued by the attention placed on the ISU/SSD, and the latter. But the limited incorporation of the military headship in politics and the expansion of benefits and facilities for corruption for the military leadership corps obviously mollified the latter, so that this arrangement neutralized the possibility of a military coup against the government led by senior officers.

Stevens brought this policy to a pretty pass when he was about to retire, by manipulating to install the head of the army, Joseph Momoh, as the new head of state in November, 1985. One issue obviously picked on in this development was to see Stevens appointment of Momoh, of the Limba

2 Personal communications from Dr. Bankole Thompson, then solicitor-general in Sierra Leone.

group like Stevens himself, as ample evidence of an ethnically based entrenchment of 'northern' elements, into the political system. Dixon-Fyle (1989) concludes on this point by suggesting that Momoh, before he became President had always championed the interests of the not insignificant northern elements in the army.

In the ethnic configuration of Sierra Leone, the north/south dichotomy could be very misleading. It is possible to view Southern Sierra Leone in terms of 'Mende', one of the two largest ethnic groups in the country, since almost all ethnic groups in the south speak Mende as a first or second language. The foremost Mende historian, Arthur Abraham (1978), discusses this historically as the 'Mendenization' of the South. This linguistic affiliation was translated into political solidarity during the 1960s and thereafter, when a Mende dominated government inherited political office from colonial rule and continued until the military coup of 1968.

But one cannot view northern Sierra Leone in similar terms. The term 'northerners' in Sierra Leone politics, sometimes used synonymously with the Temne, the second largest ethnic group of almost equal size as the Mende, does not have the same meaning as southern/Mende. Most of the ethnic groups in the north do not identify themselves with the Temne or speak Temne as a second language. Thus while a Kissi, Vai, Sherbro from the south could often speak Mende and identify politically with the Mende the same cannot be said for a Koranko, Yalunka and Limba from the north, most of whom do not speak Temne. Even with the advent of APC rule, most of these groups, though identifying themselves with the APC, never interpreted this association in terms of a Temne dominated relationship.

Siaka Stevens was acutely aware of this distinction and used it to effect particularly in the army. It was never Momoh's, but Siaka Stevens's policy to promote minority ethnic groups in the army, particularly Koranko, as a counterweight to Temne and Ménde. Thus while Momoh, Stevens' military commander, was Limba, most of the senior officer corps were Koranko with the rest spread almost evenly among all other ethnic groups. Stevens also threw many appointments in the civil service and corporations around, without concentrating them on any one ethnic group. While his second-in command as political leader, for many years, S, I, Koroma, was Temne and pursued a policy of entrenching Temne interests, Stevens was careful not to clearly entrench Temne control in the most important positions even though the bulk of his mass support lay with that ethnic group. His first head of the civil service and friend, G, L, V, Williams was a Krio, followed by Abdul Karim, a Temne, and on dismissing Karim he appointed JPA Koroma, a Mende.

Thus it could be said that Stevens de-emphasised ethnicity in both the army and civil society, often looking to minority groups with less affiliation to either of the two large ethnic groups-Temne and Mende, even though the APC was always seen as a 'northern stronghold' party. This is how one political commentator described Stevens policy in 1978 by saying that 'the country's stability is due in no small measure, to his (Stevens') careful balancing of political forces' (*Financial Times* 1978).

Siaka Stevens therefore addressed the issue of the army by one of limited incorporation into politics, while providing a countervailing force in the SSD. The threat seemed to have been removed of an army elite led military coup, while the rank and file of the army were deprived of arms.

The whole situation changed however in 1991. The emergence of a border war meant that the rank and file of the army had to be armed. These were the very people, with young junior officers, who were sent to prosecute the war. This development cancelled out all the calculations on which military/civil relations in politics had been predicate and paved the ground for the 1992 military coup. Thus Hutchful's comment that the 'new (military) regimes, unlike the old, have been overwhelmingly young in composition and drawn primarily from the military underclass' (1989) is explainable in terms of these developments.

In many ways then, the 1992 military coup in Sierra Leone could be seen as a revolt by junior officers against a privileged, affluent military command which had become indistinguishable from the political elite, both in the perceptions of the mainstream of the military and the population at large. An examination of the concatenation of situations which led to the military coup of 1992 and made it welcome to the majority of Sierra Leoneans, is thus necessary here.

Pressures for Political Change

Influences both internal and external contributed to the changes which made the military take-over almost inevitable. The demise of communism, both in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, had a undoubted effect on the general atmosphere of politics.³ It contributed to a greater interest on the part of the United States and other western governments to give at least clear signals of rejection, at best, as in the case of Kenya, a withdrawal of financial support for authoritarian and one party regimes in third world countries. This signal encouraged international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund to start at least harping on democratisation of politics as part of the conditionalities for financial support to ailing authoritarian economies.

3 For a discussion of the effects of these developments on Africa, see Kunz 1991.

External and internal influences quickly blended. In April 1990, students from a teachers' college in Makeni in the Northern Province, successfully protested outside the local police station for the release of one of their lecturers who had been arrested for collecting petitions in favour of multi-party democracy (*West Africa* 1992a).

This call was picked up by a radical newspaper in Freetown, *The New Shaft*, whose editor, Franklyn Bunting Davies, had been previously detained by the government. The *New Shaft* published, in its May issues, a form which it called on citizens to complete and return to the Press in favor of multi partyism. These forms he promised to forward to the President. He proclaimed that he got 25,000 completed forms back.

The following month, the Sierra Leone Bar Association held its 11th Annual Conference in Freetown with the theme: 'The effects of contemporary constitutional and political changes in Eastern Europe on Africa — Sierra Leone: A Case Study'. The keynote address at this conference, attended by this writer, was given by the British High Commissioner, Derek Patridge, who adversely criticized the provisions in Sierra Leone's constitution for a one-party government. A panel discussion at the conference involved Bunting-Davies, the *New Shaft* editor. The meeting ended with a resolution calling for a multi-party constitution (*West Africa* 1990a).

The pressure was kept up by the Bar Association after the meeting and by students of Fourah Bay College and Njala University College, both of the University of Sierra Leone (*West Africa* 1990b). The Njala students staged a demonstration outside their campus, blocking the main highway eight miles off their school and attacking vehicles of top government ministers and officials. They also went round schools in the area counselling schoolgoers on the need for multi-party government.

The President bowed to the pressure and called a National Constitutional Review Commission in September 1990, which held sittings throughout the country. This proved a real political awareness campaign and led to recommendations for a new constitution involving multi party politics.

The President accepted the Commission's report in March 1991. A Government White Paper on the new constitution was released May 23 indicating steps for a rapid move towards implementation of this new constitution (*ARB* 1991a). Following the provisions of the White Paper, the new constitution was passed by Parliament August 3 and followed by a referendum later that month which reported a 75 % support nationwide for implementation (*West Africa* 1991). With the President's signing, this new constitution evidently became the established law.

The Border War

The initial acceptance by the President of the commission report coincided almost exactly with first reports of armed clashes on the Sierra Leone/Liberia border between rebel forces and units of the Sierra Leone army, which took place on March 23, 1991.⁴

It was understood that Charles Taylor, the leader of the main rebel faction fighting in the civil war in neighbouring Liberia, had instigated the formation of a Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by a former corporal in the Sierra Leone Army, Foday Sankoh, to invade Sierra Leone. This was apparently to destabilize Sierra Leone with active support from Charles Taylor's forces, as Sierra Leone had been active in supporting the moves by the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) to end the Liberian civil war against Charles Taylor's interest, when the latter appeared to be winning the war.

The RUF made rapid advances in the eastern province in the first three months, supported by local allies recruited from within Sierra Leone during the war. It was reported that Charles Taylor had declared Foday Sankoh as Governor of Sierra Leone at Pendembu, in the eastern Sierra Leone border area, by April (ARB 1991b).

The Sierra Leone army, bloated in the upper echelons with relative luxury, inactivity and lack of arms and ammunition, was totally incompetent in keeping off these flimsy rebels. Information collected in Freetown claimed that the government recruited hoodlums, as it was wont to do to address politically violent threats to its survival. These dangerous elements were now incorporated into the main army to prosecute the war, further undermining morale in the army. Wrote one eyewitness, British journalist Matthew Tostevin, soldiers spoke of running from the rebel advance with nothing to defend themselves. The RUF leader claimed he was going to establish multi-party democracy in Sierra Leone.

But the appeal of the RUF evaporated after President Momoh accepted the findings of the constitutional commission and began making moves to open political activity to new political parties. Sierra Leone also managed to obtain support from friendly countries, particularly Nigeria and neighbouring Guinea, to at least check the advance of the rebels (ARB 1991c).

The New Constitution and Political Activity

As the border war continued with lackluster enthusiasm on either side, the political situation in Sierra Leone became heated. It became clear that under

4 ARB, 28, 4 April 1991. The author was in *Freudian* when the first reports were broadcast on the local radio.

the new constitution many of the incumbent ministers would lose their seats in cabinet with little likelihood of being reappointed. The constitution dictated that new cabinet ministers could be appointed outside of parliament but if they already held parliamentary seats, these should be relinquished. Newly appointed ministers however had to be approved by Parliament (*ARB 1991c*).

This possibility led to intense political realignment and behind the scene activity on the part of leading APC party stalwarts, who now saw their salvation in the political limelight as depending on setting up their own parties. A virtual breakup of the APC party and consequently the government seemed to loom large on the horizon. The APC government reacted first by sacking from the party ten leading APC figures, some of them former ministers, in September. One incumbent, the Minister of National Development and Economic Planning, Dr Siaka Kanu, was also sacked along with the others (*West Africa 1991b*). Chaos seemed to be setting in and on September 23, President Momoh reacted by a cabinet reshuffle, replacing virtually the entire cabinet with new people from outside parliament (*West Africa 1991c*), obviously following guidelines from the new constitution.

But with the vacillating and indecisive character of the President, he could not consummate this bold political stroke. He retained a few ministers from the former cabinet. These included Dr. Abdulai Conteh, who now became First Vice President. The powerful Police chief, Bambay Kamara, and head of the army, Tarawali, also remained as cabinet ministers, thus continuing the limited participation of the army in politics, a relic of the old constitution.

It was clear, by this time, that the President was using both the old and the new constitutions as suited him, on the advice, some sources claim, of Dr Abdulai Conteh, a crafty legal expert and former Attorney General. To save the retained former ministers, whom a now hostile Parliament might not have approved of, the President did not get the new ministers approved by parliament as the new constitution demanded. Disillusionment particularly among the elite about the proposed political change and the new constitution set in. The conclusion drawn was that the government was merely making cosmetic changes and had no intention to bring in genuine political change.

Multi party political activity was authorized in September and in October, six such parties were registered, four of them led by former ministers of APC administrations (*ARB 1991d*). These parties and their leaders, hoping to regain access to the political positions they had recently lost, obviously became severely critical of the president and his new government and the manipulations of the constitution.

There was however much apathy on the part of the populace, not the least amused by the hostile speeches of these former ministers against a government which they used to run and support with unquestioned enthusiasm before being sacked from office. The mood was encapsulated by a student of Fouray Bay College, who embarrassingly questioned Salia Jusu-Sheriff, veteran politician and leader of the revived Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) at a rally at the college under the new politics. The student's question was couched in words to the effect, can you tell us what element of disagreement or opposition you demonstrated as a leading cabinet minister of the APC government you are now condemning after being sacked?⁵

There was talk, apparently initially only rumours, that the government's avowed intention to call up elections at the end of the border war was a ploy, that the government had no urge to prosecute the border war, the continuance of which provided an excuse for not calling elections.

One of the local newspapers, the *New Breed*, organ for a new political party determined to exclude former leading APC politicians, especially cabinet ministers, concretized this talk into a publication, claiming this came from minutes of a secret APC executive meeting. Another tabloid, *The Vision*, also published a similar story (*West Africa* 1992a). The President detained the editors of the two newspapers for a number of days before they were released (*West Africa* 1992a).

Aggravating the Army

In the first few months of 1992, the border war had come to appear less alarming. The government and the military leadership tended to relax. Much of the national resources, amounting to 1.2 billion leones (about US \$ 2.5m) by the President's announcement, was being spent on the war, 'on daily rations and logistics' (*West Africa* 1992b).

But the soldiers on the war front were apparently not receiving this material support, not even their salaries. To quote from the speech of the chairman Strasser a few days after the coup:

our soldiers continue to sacrifice their lives on the war front in spite of very poor logistic support provided by the government whose leadership sit in Freetown enriching themselves by gross appropriation of war funds (Freudian 1992a).

5 Personal communication from a Fouray Bay College lecturer present at the meeting. For concerns about new wines in old bottles, see *West Africa* 1991e.

The government was at its same old game again, appropriating funds for specific tasks which hardly received such funds. These funds were then misappropriated.

The rank and file of the army, hitherto benefiting least from the corruption of the military elite, had reason enough to be bitter, for the border war exposed their vulnerability. They were virtually being used as fodder for the rebel troops — poorly armed, and being sent to die. They had expressed this bitterness against their military and government leadership to friends and even foes on the war front and in Freetown. To cap it all, they were now not even receiving their salaries. This was a key factor which prompted a delegation which left the war front on the night of April 28 to get to Freetown to air their grievances. Unfortunately for the government, this rebellious group was armed. As indicated earlier, it had been an unstated policy since the early days of APC rule, to keep the army disarmed for fear of their staging a coup d'état.⁶ But the soldiers fighting on the war front had to be armed.

The April 29 Coup d'Etat

The initial quest of the soldiers, from all reports, was for their salaries and improved conditions on the war front. On arriving in Freetown on April 29, they were apparently met by a government and military leadership determined to treat their demands with levity. By the early hours of April 29, the rebels had fired their way into control of State House and insisted on their demands, giving a deadline. But the Government was adamant. The President went on the local radio by noon to denounce the group calling them misguided malcontents reportedly to prevent themselves from being executed as mutinous rebels, the soldiers decided to overthrow the government. An hour after the President Broadcast, Captain Strasser went on the air on a private commercial broadcasting system to announce the overthrow of the government (*Freudian* 1992b).

After the two statements by the President Momoh and Captain Strasser, the radio stations went silent for the rest of the day, creating tremendous confusion about the situation. It turned out that in that period there had been an attempt to counter the coup by troops loyal to the President, led by the head of military intelligence, Colonel SIM Turay (*Freudian* 1992b).

But this was unknown to most people at the time. As often in such information shutout, people turned to the world press, often the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC programme, Focus on Africa of

6 This was repeatedly indicated to me throughout the 1980s by disgruntled top APC officials. Relating to this policy, see (*Freudian* 1992b), for a reported reaction of the deputy head of the army about arming the soldiers on the war front.

April 29, broadcast an interview at 5.15 p.m. GMT (1.15 p.m. in the US) with Lieutenant-colonel Yaya Kanu of the Sierra Leone Military Forces which this writer listened to.

In this interview, Yaya Kanu indicated that soldiers from the war front had taken over control of the government. He declared he was not one of those had staged the coup and that he had only featured in negotiations with the government. Kanu declared in the interview that he had not been appointed leader of any military junta but that the leader and member would be announced subsequently. He mentioned he had been asked to be on the ruling council, and pledged his overwhelming support for returning the country to civilian rule as quickly as possible.

But Yaya Kanu, who had been a leader of one of the forces on the war front, had apparently been named as one of the coup plotters in the first broadcast of the putsch by a Valentine Strasser. This move by Kanu, distancing himself from the coup, obviously annoyed the rebel leaders who dropped Kanu, the latter ending up in detention (*Freudian* 1992b).

Because of the uncertainty of about 24 hours about who was the new head of state, Yaya Kanu had come to be seen as the front figure, particularly by the international press. It was only on the next day, April 30, that Captain Strasser made a new statement, followed by a formal broadcast later in the day as the new head of state (*Freudian* 1992b).

As would perhaps be evident here, the reasons for staging a coup d'état are not clearly evident. One source, *Africa Analysis*, mentions in retrospect that 'the coup was not the spontaneous action of protesting soldiers'. Some information which seems to have been suppressed, might lend some credence to this thinking.

The initial mutiny of soldiers had already been reported in major western news networks like CNN and the BBC on the evening of April 28. Subsequent investigations in Freetown would suggest that nothing was known in Freetown about April 28 when the soldiers actually left their positions on the war front for Freetown. The Western press clearly had foreknowledge about the mutiny and broadcast it before it was known in Freetown. That this factor was largely suppressed by the press in Freetown would suggest that plans for a military take-over might well have been laid in association with the protest against conditions on the war front.

A new National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was set up, later complemented by a 21 strong cabinet for ministers holding responsibilities for various sectors of government (*Freudian* 1992a, 1992b). According to Captain Strasser's speech, the country is now ruled by the ... NPRC. This implied that the cabinet was subordinate to the NPRC. Most of the members of the NPRC were however members of cabinet, headed also by Strasser. Apart from the army officers, the NPRC included three civilians and the new head of Police, Joseph Stanley.

The cabinet on the other hand included these same four non-military officers and three others. One member of the NPRC, who was also the new Minister of Finance, Dr. Jim Forna, was carried over from the overthrown APC government. He was one of the new ministers, formerly living abroad, who had been appointed in erstwhile President Momoh's major cabinet reshuffle of September 1991. Also retained from that last Momoh cabinet at this same post was Dr. Ahmed Bumbuya who had also become a Minister of Foreign Affairs in September, 1991.

That the military coup d'état received initial enthusiasm among the populace is, in retrospect, without question. *Africa Analysis*, in a report quoted in a December 1992 publication of a local newspaper, *For Di People* in Freetown, stated that 'the euphoria that welcomed their (the military government's) arrival has now died down' (*Freudian* 1992c). An *Africa Confidential* publication of 22 January, 1993 maintained that 'Strasser was hailed as "the redeemer" after the coup'. One of the Sierra Leone tabloids most critical of the current military government, the *New Breed*, published a piece addressed to the military head of state, Strasser, in its December 9 1992 issue, reminiscing that last April 19, you became the Chairman of the NPRC and head of state through the gun, but with an overwhelming popular support.

This general acknowledgement of the initial popularity of the coup was obviously in reaction to the proposed constitutional changes which, as indicated earlier, had come to be seen by the people as a cosmetic change, a ploy by the corrupt and oppressive APC government to retain itself in office. As revealed after the coup, plans has been in place by Momoh's government to rig the upcoming elections and declare itself the winner.

Role of Fourah Bay College Students

It seems evident that the young leaders of the coup had very close relationships with University students, partly because a few of them had relatively recently been students at the University, partly also since they knew that students of similar ages as theirs had continued to remain strongly opposed to the APC government. The hostility of the students to the APC government goes back more perceptibly to 1977 when these students spearheaded a near successful attempt to bring down the APC government, then led by its founder, Siaka Stevens.

The disruption had followed a student demonstration against Siaka Stevens, also chancellor of the University, at a convocation ceremony at the College in January 1977. The APC government sent an ISU led group of thugs two days later to bust up the college campus. The students then incited school pupils to pour out into the streets of Freetown in widespread demonstrations, accompanied by rioting and looting by the underprivileged. This spread to the rest of the country and the government nearly collapsed.

The movement eventually failed and the main leader, Hindolo Trye, eventually left the country.⁷

Fourah Bay College students continued to celebrate what they called 'All Thugs Day' on January 31, the day in 1977 when their college was ravaged by the thugs. Students have therefore been in the forefront of opposition to the APC government. In January 1992, in addition to the celebration of All Thugs Day, the students had planned a mass demonstration into the streets of Freetown, calling on President Momoh to resign. They were on their way to Freetown from their hilltop campus when armed police dispersed them with tear gas and bullets.⁸

That the students were on the same wavelength as the coup plotters is testified to by the fact that the coup leaders went to the Fourah Bay College campus on the day after the coup and invited the students to Freetown to demonstrate support for the coup. While this invitation was not carried by the Press, the subsequent jubilant dancing along the streets of Freetown led by the students that same day was given full press coverage.

On May 5, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) which included students of the other colleges, organized a solidarity march of school children, students and ordinary citizens from the city centre to the Siaka Stevens Stadium at Brook fields in Freetown. Describing this parade, a local newspaper mentioned about the NUSS that this body had always been opposed to the APC. The parade was addressed by the new head of state, Chairman Strasser (*Freudian* 1992a). In the days following the coup, the new military governors were reportedly frequent at the College campus visiting their friends in the dorms, and Fourah Bay College began to get frequent electricity supply where hitherto it had virtually been receiving no allocation in the scanty rationing system that had existed in Freetown.

The Military Junta and Reactions to the Coup d'Etat

Military rule might never be welcome per se by any people. Its initial acceptance is often related to the situation prevailing immediately before it. This delusion of accomplishment soon dies down as people begin to take a hard look at military rule, weighing the advantages and problems. Those which benefit most from any civilian government in place, particularly sections of the middle class, would always be very hostile to a military government which does not provide similar benefits for that sector. The rest

7 See (Fyle 1981). Hindolo Trye has returned home after the coup to be appointed as Secretary of State for Information by the new military junta, in a reorganized political structure which names former ministers and members of cabinet as secretaries of state.

8 Reported in *West Africa*, (1992c). Further information was obtained from Fourah Bay College students.

of the population continues to view a military government in relation to what it sets out to do, what it could be seen to be doing, and significantly its perceived intention to quit office. The rest of this analysis will address these issues.

Objectives

According to one commentary, early policy commitments include(d) ending corruption and 'indiscipline', launching economic recovery and democratic politics and speedily ending the debilitating war against Liberian incursions and domestic rebellion in the south and east (*Africa Confidential* 1992). This closely follows the statement by the chairman of the NPRC government, Captain Strasser, in his speech to mark the first anniversary of the revolution on April 29, 1993.

Accountability and Discipline

As a major move against corruption and indiscipline in office, the military government quickly moved to set up three Commissions of Enquiry to investigate the financial activities of former government ministries, parastatals, public corporations, of ministers of government and public servants. The Commissions were headed by eminent justices of the High Court — Justices Beccles Davies, Laura Marcus-Jones and Lynton Nylander. The proceedings of the Commissions were given wide press coverage in the radio and newspapers in Sierra Leone. These proceedings went a long way to restoring a proper sense of values among a population which had grown accustomed, during the long period of APC rule, to a standard that one was respected if one was affluent, even if it was palpably clear that the money was obtained through corrupt practices or from plundering government resources.

The first report of the Lynton Nylander Commission was published in April, 1993, and the government proceeded to quickly issue a White Paper or policy document, accepting the results of the Commission and proceeding to implement them, confiscating extremely dubious assets of public officials indicted in the Commissions' findings.⁹

The fight against indiscipline was reportedly taken to within the ranks of the NPRC. By September, 1992, Lieutenant-colonel D, K, Anderson responsible for the Department of Mineral Resources, and Lieutenant-

9 Sierra Leone Government. White Paper on the Report of the Justice Lynton Nylander Commission of Inquiry into the Financial Activities of Government Ministries or Departments, Local Authorities, Parastatals including Public Corporations, Commissions or Councils established under the Constitution within the period 22 day of June, 1986 to 22 Day of September, 1991, Volume I, April 1993. Freudian, the Government Printing Department.

Colonel Gabriel Mani in charge of the Southern Province were dropped from the Supreme Military Council. While it was officially reported that Anderson was being sent on a training programme to Ghana (*Freudian 1992d*), the real reason for his dismissal, on investigation, was that he had been involved in shady deals in the diamond region where he was virtually resident. Mani had been removed in relation to the manhandling of a priest in the Southern Province, a clear case of abuse of office.

The Border War and the Military Government

The satisfaction of the populace at the anti-corruption and discipline restoration moves was not necessarily extended to the issue of the protracted border war. In his first anniversary speech on April 29, Chairman Strasser reported that: 'our soldiers on the war front have succeeded in containing further advances by the rebels and have in fact recaptured some strategic areas formerly under (rebel) control'. He concluded, on this issue that: 'the morale of all soldiers at the war front is now very high and there are open indications that the conclusion of this brutal and savage war is in sight' (*West Africa 1993a*).

Unconfirmed sources have indicated that the border war gradually became more complicated than a mere fight against Liberian backed rebels of Charles Taylor. Sources assert that elements from the former civilian government of Joseph Momoh, mainly now resident in neighbouring republic of Guinea have been using the war to destabilize and possibly invade Sierra Leone. One local tabloid in Freetown discussed this in an issue, naming a junior minister in the former Momoh government, Musa Gendemeh, as fighting behind rebel lines in attacks on diamond rich Kono, Gendemeh's home area. Gendemeh was in fact accused of getting his wives in Kono to cook for the rebels, apparently deceiving the women into believing they were preparing food for friendless. The editorial in the newspaper sums up the situation by saying that 'there is now a thin line between external aggression by Charles Taylor and internal disturbances caused by APC diehards' (*Freudian 1992e*).

The continued existence of the border war has no doubt influenced the attitude of Sierra Leoneans towards the military government. If the latter appears to be prosecuting the border war successfully, something that no one seemed to credit the previous government with, then it would be rather difficult to manifest general opposition against military rule.

Socio-economic Change and the Military Government

There have been other developments which have helped to dampen basic opposition to the military government. Electrical energy supply in Freetown, at 2 MW before the military took over, improved to 10 MW not long after the coup. This brought electrical energy back to Freetown, though not for 24

hours a day. This situation was welcome by the citizenry, as in the few years before the military coup Freetown had hitherto seemed to remain in perpetual darkness, except for the military barracks and residential areas of the former government ministers on the western hills overlooking the city.

Equally so fuel, in extremely short supply for a few years before 1992, returned to the pumps following the coup at a cost initially the same as the previous rationed supply. In fact the increase in the pump price within the year has been only about ten percent. This helped to ease transportation in the country generally, and obviated the need for excessive hoarding and racketeering of fuel. The military was again seen to be addressing pressing problems.

There were other more readily observable improvements in the socio-economic situation in the country within the twelve months of military rule. By March 1993, it was reported that 'the average monthly increase of prices.... has been reduced from over 6% in the past to the present 1.7%. The exchange rate increase has been stabilized at an average monthly rate of 1.4%, compared to 7.1% in the previous 10 months' (*Freudian* 1993e).

As regards the staple food, rice, one analysis comments that the cost of a 50 kg. bag of rice was Le8,000, while the average salary was Le5,000. 'The NPRC government increased salaries by 100% and ensured that the cost of a bag of rice remains stagnant' (*West Africa* 1993b). Small improvement, one might say, to the lot of the average worker, but it seemed to suggest a step in the right direction.

The government has also approved the 6-3-3-4 system of education, a programme designed to diversify the educational system and place emphasis squarely on job skills as on the 'bookish' type education. This programme has been suggested since a major education review in Sierra Leone of 1974 but the APC government made no move to address this much discussed programme.

In road construction, the military government commenced, in March 1993, the construction of the Waterloo-Masiaka road, the only arterial link between the capital, Freetown, and the rest of the country. This road had remained in the most horrible condition for a few years while the previous government could not get its act together to commence construction.

The net evaluation of these developments is that the military government has given a sense of addressing major areas of concern the average citizen is quick to notice. But this has not been without its drawbacks, many of which some attribute to the inevitable problems associated with military rule, which cannot solve any nation's ills.

Military Rule — The Problem Areas

One of these problems areas has been a sense of insecurity. Particularly in the first few months after the coup, there were frequent complaints in the

press and with the citizenry that armed soldiers in uniforms had been prominent in armed robberies during night hours of curfew imposed by the military government (*Freudian* 1992f, 1992g).

There were also several reports of harassment of people at the considerably increased road checkpoints throughout the country and of extortion by soldiers (*Freudian* 1992d). One tabloid, the *New Breed*, in an open letter to chairman Strasser, called on the government to stop the arbitrary arrest and detention of innocent people (*Freudian* 1992h).

The military government also passed certain decrees regarded as wholly unpalatable by the populace and outside observers. The Public Emergency Regulations included Public Notice No.25 of 1992, 'where military personnel above the rank of sergeant and police officers above the rank of superintendent could break into and effect a search of any premises without a warrant'. This was claimed as opening the sluice gate to victimization and robbery. Equally detestable were the regulations in Decree No.6 aimed at 'the prevention and restriction of propaganda publications by newspapers' (*West Africa* 1993a). This was effectively press censorship, hotly contested by the local press.

Another major obnoxious regulations was the Treason and other Senior Officers Special Military Tribunal Decree 1992, which set up military tribunals to speedily try offenders. It was under the provisions of this decree that 26 alleged coup plotters were speedily tried at the end of December, 1992, sentenced to death and executed. This brought a furor in the world press which even doubted allegations of any putsch (*Africa Confidential* 1992; *ARB* 1993). The executions brought on a reaction by some foreign 'friendly' governments like Britain and Italy which announced suspension of aid programmes.

The present writer was in Freetown during the attempted coup, speedy trial and executions. Freetown seemed to heave a sigh of relief at the executions; the feelings was that the threat of former APC supporters wanting to stage a comeback as manifested in the border war complications, and two reported attempted coups, made it necessary for the government to do something to stem the sense of imminent danger. On January 1, 1993. New Years Day, which was the day after the executions, there was an elaborate scene of festivity at Lumley Beach, the most accessible and popular beach resort just outside Freetown. The beach was literally clogged with people celebrating the usual holiday festivity, demonstrating no sense of remorse, insecurity, or rejection of the action of the government in executing the accused coup plotters.

With the first anniversary celebrations of the military government, the chairman of the NPRC announced the repeal of the decrees calling for search without warrant and gagging of the press. The decree relating to the military tribunal was amended to now include in the tribunal a Judge of the

Superior Court of the Judicature to be Chairman of the Tribunal. Chairman Strasser also announced on the same day that the government had released all the political detainees from prison, placing them under protective custody in their own homes.

Middle Class Businesses and the Military Government

Criticism of the military government by the middle class has indeed been ambivalent, since this has been one segment of the population hardest hit by the incoming NPRC government. An attempt was made in the process of this study to understand numerous reports in the press and in Freetown in general that business had declined with the coming of military rule, and that businesses 'are closing, with many fleeing the country as the cost of living becomes almost intolerable' (ARB 1992).

While the military government has been unable to radically alter the economic climate within a year, one factor that seemed patently clear is that the free flow of money from fake government contracts, kickbacks, customs duty avoidance deals, etc, had largely evaporated. This easy money had circulated very readily within a small range of people in the middle class and had sustained whatever business seemed to be booming in Sierra Leone. Successful businesses has amounted to being in the right circles for getting fake contracts or kickbacks. With this development largely arrested by the coming of the military junta, most of the businesses related to this corrupt activity could not last and so folded up. Many involved in such businesses were therefore critical of the government which brought this calamity on them without explaining the reasons why. Speaking to two prominent dentists in Freetown, they claimed that since the coup their clientele, consisting largely of the Lebanese, businessmen, politicians, civil servants, their families and girlfriends, had been drastically reduced since their customers could no longer pay for dental services. Evidently, the true picture of an extremely weak economy was being laid bare by the moves of the incoming military junta. The blame for their misfortune would be laid, by those hardest hit, at the most obvious door, that of the military government.

Conclusion

What has been said so far has tended to suggest that there has not been enough reason to support or kindle latent anti-military sentiment among the people in Sierra Leone. It is clear however, that, the views of external developed world institutions apart, the majority of Sierra Leoneans would prefer civilian rule, all things being equal. This was made evident when tremendous cheers greeted Captain Strasser's announcement in his first anniversary speech that: 'with effect from today, 29 April, 1993, the NPRC will return this country to multi-party democratic civilian rule within three years' (West Africa 1993a).

The military government had earlier set up an Advisory Council, designated, among other things, to work out the modalities for the return to multi-party democracy. Speaking to the press after the swearing-in ceremony of the council on December 8, 1992, Strasser stated that this was initiating a programme of transition which would go a long way 'to free a government like ours from the suspicion of entrenching ourselves and clinging on to power forever' (Freudian 1992f).

There has not been much information about the deliberations of the Advisory Council on the modalities of a return to multi-party democracy. The presence of the advisory council and the probable imminent conclusion of the border war would perhaps focus attention again on the issue of a return to civilian rule.

Bibliography

- Abraham, A, 1978, *Mende Government and Politics Under Colonial Rule*, Freudian, Sierra Leone University Press, pp.1-3.
- Africa Confidential*, 1992, January 22.
- , 1992, 9 October.
- Africa Research Bulletin (ARB)*, *Political Series*, 1991, Oxford, England, 28, 6, June.
- , 1991d, 28, 12 November.
- , 1992, 29, December 12.
- , 1993, 30, 1, January 1031.
- Bebler, A, 1973, *Military Rule in Africa*, New York, Praeger, pp.64-70.
- Cox, T, S, 1976, *Civil/Military Relations in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, p.4.
- Decalo, S, 1976, *Coups and Military Rule in Africa*, New Haven, Yale University Press, p.7.
- Dixon-Fyle, M, 1989, 'Reflections on the Role of the Military in Civilian Politics: The Case of Sierra Leone', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 35, 2.
- Douglas, C, Anglia, 1990, 'Southern African Responses to Eastern European Developments', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28.
- Financial Times*, 1978, London, 'Survey — Sierra Leone', December 11, p.29.
- Freudian* tabloids, 1992, *The Globe*, July 15-21.
- , 1992c, *For Di People*, December 24.
- , 1992h, *New Breed*, December 9-15.
- , 1992d, *New Citizen*, October 5.
- , 1992f, *New Oracle*, July 21-30.
- , 1992e, *New Shaft*, December 15-21.
- , 1992g, *Weekend Spark*, September 18.
- , 1992a, *Progress*, May 9.
- , 1992b, *The Vision*, May 12.
- , 1993, *New Breed*, March 16.
- Fyle, Magbaily, C, 1981, *The History of Sierra Leone: A Concise Introduction*, London, Evans, p.142.
- Hutchful, E, 1989, *Military and Militarism in Africa: A Research Agenda*, CODESRIA Working Paper, No.3, p.10.

Africa Development

Hutchful, E, 1990, 'Institutional Collapse and the Rise of the Military Mass Movement in Ghana', Paper presented to the CODESRIA Seminar on the Military and Militarism in Africa, Accra, April 21-23, p.5.

Kunz, Frank, A, 1991, 'Liberalization in Africa: Some Preliminary Reflections', *African Affairs*, 90, 359, 1991.

West Africa, 1990, 21-27 May.

-----, 1990, 30 July - 5 August.

-----, 1991a, 16-22 September.

-----, 1991b, 1991e, 4-10 November.

-----, 1991c, 30 September to 6 October.

-----, 1992a, 23-29 March.

-----, 1992b, 11-17 May.

-----, 1993a, May 10-16.

-----, 1993b, No.3952, June, 21-27.

* The Ohio State University, Department of Black Studies, College of Humanities, Columbus, USA.