

NOTES ON THE REVOLUTION IN SOMALIA

by Basil Davidson

What has chiefly **changed** in the quality of African studies since **Socialist Register** first came out eleven years ago is that Marxist approaches and analyses have moved into the body of the hall. Of course they had long existed, but they had spoken from a distance and sometimes as it seemed from a very distant distance, or, when on the spot, only in muffled voices coming from the attic or the cellar. They were heard among the liberal orthodox or those whom the orthodox had in mind to educate, but were generally disregarded; and the disregarding was all the easier because of the uncertainty of what they said or seemed to say, as well as of the circumstances in which they had to say it.

That was the period, before about 1964, when much could still be heard in this context of "the Asiatic mode" and even of "primitive communism", forms that proved extremely hard to derive from any factual evidence, even by analysts for whom the findings would have proved a nice convenience. It was also the period, though drawing to a close, when the viability of African nation-states conceived on some kind of capitalist model had still to unfold an unavoidable frustration. The right in its broadest sense took that viability for granted. The left, though in a narrower sense, questioned it but still had to accept its possibility.

In Africa itself, as it happened, there were points at which the questioning was persistent and acute. Nkrumah in Ghana was evolving a critique of what may be called the capitalist thesis even by 1960; so was **Sékou Touré**; in Guinea; so were some others elsewhere, among whom I do not mean to include, of course, all those avatars of "African socialism" and other such mystifications whose gaff, then, was not quite blown, at least among many for whom Africa was still a remote continent of which they knew nothing, or not much. Yet "Nkrumahism" or "Consciencism" or **Touré's** multi-volumed prescriptions, though clearly meant to be taken seriously, appeared rather hard to recognise in the practice of a principled alternative. They were evidently searching for a road to a non-capitalist future which would eventually grow into a socialist future, but the roads they found seemed to go in different directions, and sometimes back to their starting point.

This is not really to criticise those pioneers: they were wrestling with realities still imperfectly revealed, and in situations where all the odds were

piled against them. One might add, too, that in those years around **1960** there was far less of a sense of urgency than would soon develop. Nowadays it is fashionable to cry down those "first independences". Yet their gains then seemed large because they really were so. Nkrumah's slogan of the late fifties, "Seek ye first the political kingdom. . .", had an *obvious* validity that needs to be remembered by latterday critics. The gains were duly exhausted and the great "disillusionment" set in: but it set in, one should also remember, at varying points of time. In Nigeria, perhaps, one might say that it began in **1963**, even possibly in **1962**. But those were years when the nationalist movements of much of eastern and central Africa had still to achieve power, let alone show what they would do with power when they had got it.

So far as Western scholarship is concerned, the arrival of a serious Marxist approach from the basis of African data—from a study, one is inclined to say, of the real as distinct from the imaginary—can be assigned to the early sixties. Perhaps one may even date it to **October 1964** when Jean Suret-Canale published a paper, *Les Sociétés traditionnelles en Afrique tropicale et le Concept de Production asiatique*, for this was to set in motion a whole sequence of constructive controversy. Standing on firm historical ground, **Suret-Canale** offered a preliminary analysis of what he called "tribal or tribo-patriarchal society" (drawing mainly on West African data), disowned the term "feudal" as applicable to historical African societies, questioned the credentials in Africa of a "slave mode of production", and concluded that if indeed Africa had known an Asiatic mode, then it had been one very different from the mode developed in Asia. The debate continued, opening many new approaches: in **1969** Catherine **Coquéry-Vidrovitch** duly followed some of these, in another seminal paper, to the point of proposing an "African mode of production."¹

Since then we have come a long way from the *Formen* and their progeny, though in directions which show repeatedly how penetratingly Marx had probed into the unknown; and it is quite unnecessary here, as well as quite impossible, to insist upon the fact with any comprehensive list of publications. Suffice it to say that there is a large sense in which Marxist analysis of Africa has freed itself from doctrinal or dogmatic pre-occupations derived from non-African models or historical situations. With accumulating knowledge, the investigation of concepts such as class and mode of production has become more subtle and more realistic than it was before. Investigation has widened; it has also deepened. All this has gone together with the beginnings of a study of African economic history, by non-Marxists as well as Marxists, which has further broadened the territory available for inspection. It can be said that we who study Africa are at least beginning to know what we do not know; and a consequent humility is perhaps no bad state of mind. The humility is a pleasant change,

at all events, from the old state of mind in which tablets of stone were brought down, not to say hurled down, from the top of a mountain whose summit nobody in fact had climbed.

All this has had for company the further unfolding of the capitalist thesis: of what Africans now generally call the "neo-colonial" situation. Its essential incapacity, even its impossibility, are revealed in an increasing number of newly-independent countries. At one level or another a whole range of studies, again by non-Marxists as well as Marxists, have examined the limitations and frustrations of the nation-state conceived on any kind of capitalist model. Samir Amin and others have given us some often brilliant books devoted to the controversy on "centre-periphery" relations. Leaving aside the more backward parts of the development-aid industry—and there the confidence even of the most orthodox seems considerably shaken—the long-term validity of the capitalist model is now seriously asserted scarcely anywhere. Only fifteen years have passed since Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* handed down the true and right prescriptions that should carry Africa to "take-off" by following in the track of the United States. But in ways that matter it might have been written in the Middle Ages.

The evidence today suggests that most African countries—even if the mood of humility may prompt one to add that there can be one or two exceptions, or partial exceptions—do not have the slightest hope of advancing by way of "the capitalist model" to anything save continued impoverishment, growing internal or even external conflict, and a deepening sense of failure.² But if the capitalist model is useless to them, or worse than useless, what is the practical alternative? How do most African countries, situated as they are now, move out of their present helplessness into frameworks that can ensure a genuine (because internally powered) development, and thus overcome mounting foreign debt, growing unemployment, increasing food imports, and a general sclerosis of social and political structure? How can African peoples realise their own potentials of human and material wealth? How can they achieve a basis of social equality and social justice on which to build a different future?

To such questions, not very surprisingly, the non-Marxists have no kind of answer, although it is interesting that many of them now apparently feel that they should have one, things being as they manifestly are, for they mutter increasingly about the virtues of a "mixed economy" in which a more or less long period of state capitalism, one is asked to suppose, will lead somehow or other to the blessings of full-blown private enterprise. Something like the Italian Fascist economy, where basic industry is owned by the state as a means of promoting private capital (and, in the case of Africa, a viable bourgeoisie) appears to be their preferred model, although its possible relevance to Africa, even on their own criteria of development, is extremely hard to see. Or perhaps the truth now is simply that trans-

national capital is content to have Africa governed in any old way so long as its own requirements continue to be met; but that, of course, is not an argument which respectable liberals could use.

Then what of the Marxists? Can it be said that with their new enlightenment they see the practical alternative clearly, or are at least in agreement on what is to be done? Scarcely. Socialism, yes: but how do you get there? Even: what exactly is socialism? Those who are true to the mood of humility remain content with advocating a "non-capitalist path", and no doubt wisely leave it at that. As for the tablets-of-stone brigade, they prefer sectarian dogmatics, and can still be found hurling down slogans such as "the African working class must take its future in its own hands", even when, alas, there is in their sense no working class to be found in practical reality. Everyone may know where the top of the mountain ought to be, in short, but nobody has much that is useful to say on how to climb there, and quite a few have much to say that is useless. In these circumstances the right answer must surely be to go back to the terrain, and discover what signposts are actually appearing there.

Africans by this time have garnered a rather wide experience of "non-capitalist paths" of one kind or another, and the signposts are various. One may leave aside such chimera as "Kenya socialism" or "Camerounian socialism" and their like, not to mention mere absurdities such as the current "revolution" in Zaire of Mobutu Sese-Seko, who has lately found it wise to assure us that he is not really Jesus Christ, even if that is who his domestic scribes say he is. There remains an impressive experience, and it is already a potent factor on the African scene. It falls into two broad categories. The first is that of the liberation movements in the former colonies of Portugal.

Their experience of the alternative to the capitalist model has been one of having to build new and, in their circumstances, necessarily non-capitalist structures in armed struggle against a colonial power. It is an experience that has developed and revealed to the world a whole new group of Marxist thinkers and men of action, some of whom are recognised already as among the most significant Africans of our time; and it is one that is rich in practical lessons. Much has been written about it, and much more will be.³

The other broad category of non-capitalist or anti-capitalist experience—and there is a certain overlap between the two categories, as well as some "special cases" such as Algeria that may belong to both—consists of ruling parties and movements which inherited a "neo-colonial" situation but have rejected it, and have begun the extremely difficult task of forging new structures and institutions to take the place of those that they "received" in the year of independence. Not by the outright break involved in revolutionary armed struggle, that is, but by the less painful though sometimes more testing process of peaceful change. Late in the sixties there

were several countries where this effort was in progress, here with more success and there with less; recently, perhaps, Tanzania has become the best-known example.

Little has been said about Somalia in the context of this second category, and yet Somalia is in many ways the most interesting example of them all. A bloodless military take-over in **1969** swept away a "neo-colonial" regime, and declared for a society "based on labour and the principle of social justice". A "second charter" of the Somali revolution announced in January **1971** that a society so based could be formed only by the aid of "the philosophical system of socialism", and, this being so, that Somalia would henceforth adopt "scientific socialism as its orbit of reference". The leader of this revolution, **Muhamad Siad Barre**, duly made it clear that this orbit of reference really did imply revolution, and had nothing to do with the illusions of "African socialism" or "Arab socialism". The since unfolding policies of the regime have also made this clear. These policies were and are aimed at evoking mass participation in transforming Somali society. Their achievements by **1975** could be examined in many fields of action.

These achievements are the more interesting because Somalia, in all the ways that are usually thought to mean development, is a notably "backward" country. In **1969**, when the effort at systematic change began, Somalia had nothing that resembled a clear class stratification, not even a nascent bourgeoisie, much less a working class; next to no industry of any kind; no domestic practice of capitalism aside from traditional forms of trade; no habit of investment save in livestock on the hoof; an extremely low level of technology, and total illiteracy in the Somali language. Upwards of four-fifths of its relatively small population were nomadic stock-raisers, only about a fifth of whom also practised a seasonal cultivation; and this was the nomadic tradition that set the tone for the whole people's ethos.

If some of these conditions are no longer there today, most remain, while the country's material poverty is now enlarged, even greatly enlarged, by a series of the worst droughts in living memory. In terms of social structure the position is more or less what it was before, and as I have just described it. Some three-fifths of the population are stock-raising nomads who do not practise any cultivation; perhaps another ten or twenty per cent practise a little; there may be upwards of ten per cent of sedentary cultivators; while the urban population appears to be about another ten per cent. I say "appears" because I am writing ahead of the **1975** census, the first that Somalia has ever known. Before that census the total population was given at **3.1** millions, but this seems likely to prove an under-estimate, even when subtracting (if one should!) all those Somali nomads who have taken refuge in Somalia from the Ogaden during the pitiless (and, in eastern Ethiopia, almost unrelieved) droughts of **1974-75**. The population of the towns is similarly hard to classify in any terms that

can afford certainty, but, according to recently published government statistics, there were **6,614** persons employed, during **1971**, in establishments with a labour force of five or more, and another **5,108** persons employed in establishments with fewer than five workers. Most of the urban population fits into that unsatisfactory but hard-to-avoid category of "petty-bourgeoisie" with a variety of employments or none at all.

All this might well make Somalia a most unpromising social structure from which to draw currents of modernising change. One could of course say much the same thing about Guinea-Bissau or Mozambique. However that may seem to be, or really be, Somalia today is demonstrably a society that has begun moving into the path of a practical alternative to the capitalist model (always admitting, of course, that the capitalist model in the Somalia of **1960-69** was in **any** case no more than a fake). As with the genuine liberation movements of the "Portuguese colonies", there is to be found here a startling illustration of the way in which policies of social transformation "from the top down", initially advocated by "the few", can with patient and persistent effort become the possession and practice of the many. That is the essential process to be seen in Somalia today, even if the process is still at an early stage and, as yet, far from irreversible. There is here a sense and atmosphere of all-embracing change, and it rests already on some hard-and-fast foundations. Much remains to be confirmed, very much remains to be developed. But the beginnings are unmistakable. Somalia is launched on the practical alternative. How did it happen?



A little history. The Somalis may total four or five million people; more or less they have always lived where they live now. Their origins are unknown but must be of a great antiquity, for their language belongs to a Cushitic group which appears to have taken shape in north-eastern Africa, above all in the "Horn" of Africa, in remote Stone Age times. Their country is impressively handsome, like themselves, but harsh in its ecology. Only a nomadic pattern of life could ensure survival, although in relatively recent times a small proportion of Somalis have assimilated themselves to "Bantu-type" forms of cultivation along the banks of the two great southern rivers, the Juba and Shebelle.

The republic of Somalia became formally independent in **1960**, enclosing some three million Somalis and a few pockets of two or three different peoples, chiefly Galla and Bantu. All the other Somalis had to stay outside their republic. Probably more than a million living chiefly in the Ogaden had to remain inside the Ethiopian empire; another large bloc living in the so-called Northern Frontier Territory were handed by the withdrawing British to the republic of Kenya; while a smaller group were obliged to remain under French colonial rule in the colony of French Somaliland, *alias* Jibuti or, more recently, Territory of the Afars and the

Issas, the Issas being Somalis.

What remained were the two Somali populations which had been administered by the British in their (northern) Somaliland Protectorate, and by the Italians in their colony of Somalia: occupied by British forces in the anti-Fascist war, this colony was handed back to Italy in 1950 but only as a ten-year "trusteeship territory" of the United Nations. In 1960 these two populations were united in the republic of Somalia.

Though leaving many Somalis to foreign rule, this republic at least retained the advantage of a rare and emphatic ethnic unity. All but small handfuls of its population were Somalis, spoke Somali, and had always felt themselves members of the Somali community. There were some differences between the two populations, partly of clan loyalty and forms of speech, partly by the fact that there were far more cultivators in the southern region than in the northern; but these differences were of no great significance. What united them was in any case of far greater influence than what divided them,

Upon what should be the nature of this Somalia the Italians and the British, in so far as they thought about it at all, were substantially agreed. There should be a parliamentary republic modelled on the pattern of the bourgeois nation-state. But the Italians had possessed the larger slice, and it was the Italians who now provided the institutional model.⁴ These Italians were the trusteeship administration set in place by the Christian-Democratic government of De Gasperi, although in fact they included many Italian Fascists who were allowed back into "trusteeship Somalia", or sent back there, as former "experts" in the colony which the old kingdom had seized at the beginning of the century, and which the Fascist regime had duly governed according to its sharply racist principles.

The results were disastrous. How far another parliamentary model might have worked less badly is a question that one could debate. But the Italian model in its Somali transplant reproduced all the worst deficiencies and absurdities of its original. The old Somali Youth League, a genuine national movement during the late 1940s and right through the 1950s, soon succumbed to them. The parliamentary and bureaucratic clientism, vote-selling, business corruption, ideological subservience or plain irresponsibility of Christian-Democratic rule in Italy reappeared in Somalia in forms that were grotesque when not outrageous, awful in their social consequences when not merely endemic. *Mussoqmassuq* and *afminsciar* became the masters of the scene, the one meaning sectional rivalry and intrigue and corruption, the other all that kind of rumour-mongering and finagling which spells demoralisation.

The measure of this system's misery could be taken by its one big success. This was to reduce the strong sense and reality of Somali unity, represented before 1960 by the Somali Youth League (whether in the north or the south), to a host of squabbling "parties". There appeared a

strident "tribalism" where, in fact, only one "tribe" existed. Clan nominees formed parties. Budding businessmen formed parties. Extended families formed parties. These contested periodic elections, only to resolve into a single coalition of one party as soon as their respective "interests" were met. At the last of these elections, in 1968, more than seventy "parties" contested a total of fewer than 130 parliamentary seats. **Tammany** Hall combined with the Mafia, and further infiltrated by a crowd of eager free-lance operators, could not have induced a deeper sense of national frustration, helplessness, and general woe.

All that, it may be argued, was in any case inherent in the model. But the transplant, as it came about, suffered from another peculiarity which did much to make matters worse. There was no Somali script. Somali scholars had made several attempts at producing one. Most of these had tried to use an Arabic script, true to Somali's powerful Islamic loyalty. They had failed because Somali's Cushitic vowels could not be made to fit. Another script had used invented signs, something after the manner of **Ge'ez**, the script of Amharic, but this was never widely adopted. As *Somali Poetry* splendidly shows, Dr. B.W. Andrzejewski evolved an efficient script in a Latin alphabet. But he did this early in the **1960s**, and the parliamentary regime had no use for any such thing. One can easily see why.

There being no Somali script, there could be no Somali literacy. All literacy, unless in Arabic, was accordingly in Italian or English. Very few Somalis were literate in either language. For this reason and others, it was they who took possession of the independent state in 1960. Literacy being a crucial key to membership of this ruling group, the monopoly was precious: the first task of an elite, after all, is to clamp rigid controls on its possible enlargement. Hence the institutional gap between rulers and ruled was widened by a special form of cultural gap. The country continued to be governed by Italian or English, languages of which the vast majority had no knowledge.

In these circumstances it might be thought that there was really no hope for the Somalis. Sorely divided by the clientism of *mussoqmassuq*, harried by *afminsciar*, and barred from any access to the seats of power by the simple fact that they could not understand Italian or English (or both), the vast majority seemed entirely caught in a trap from which they would not be able to escape. "Tribal" conflicts deepened. There began and continued a flight to the towns, where unemployment grew and thuggery duly came to prosper. Corruption moved from the baroque to the rococo. Development aid—and some came from East as well as West—helped crooks and speculators, but seldom anyone else. If I do not embark on statistical demonstrations I trust that readers will believe that they could be made, even though the statistical apparatus was scarcely an efficient one. One needs, perhaps, to think only of these seventy "parties" contesting fewer than

130 seats. . .

The means of dealing with these troubles appeared completely absent. As it happened, however, this was not quite the case.



Like other neo-colonial regimes, that of Somalia could recognise a profitable thing when it saw one. Development aid was such a thing: money from abroad. If the amount coming from the West was not enough (and in these circumstances it is never enough), then why not ask it from the East? Why not practise a kind of political blackmail that was soon to become familiar, and threaten the West, if it failed to come across, that you would go to the East? And even if the threat proved feeble, as it soon did, why not go to the East anyway? There were, it seemed, no political "dangers" to incur.

But in the sixties, at least, there were things you would not do if you could help it. Whatever help you might ask from the East, you should not train the army or the police there. The parliamentary governments accordingly succeeded in getting their police officers trained in Western Germany. But they failed with their army officers, or at least with most of them. The United States should have trained the army officers, but the United States happened already to be deeply involved in Ethiopia. Given that Somalia retained a powerful irredentist claim on the eastern districts of the Ethiopian empire, and that Haile Selassie was acutely aware of the fact, the Ethiopian card was preferred. But the army officers had to be trained somewhere. What offers? They were trained in the Soviet Union.

Now training in the Soviet Union may mean a number of different things, and it would be a vast overstatement to say that most or even many of all the Africans who were trained in various skills in the Soviet Union during the 1960s came home again with radical ideas. What ideas they came home with depended, it would seem, very largely on what ideas they went with. Many Ghanaian students went to the Soviet Union early in the 1960s. But, says Ras Makonnen in words that ring true, "the colonial mentality was so ingrained that even when we began to send hundreds of students to places like Russia, it was plain that **they** despised the Russians. . . 'What are these big boots you are wearing? In my Ghana I am accustomed to wearing English leather shoes which are well made.'"¹⁵ And of course they were so accustomed, for most of them came from Ghana's old-established and then very flourishing "trader-professional class". They accepted scholarships in Communist countries only as a poor second-best to Western scholarships, as scholarships that scarcely "counted" when compared to the greatest prize of all, a scholarship to hallowed Oxford.

With the Somalis it was different. First, their army was a very new one, dating only to 1960. They hadn't even the flimsiest "Sandhurst tradition", even though one or two of them were to be trained at Sandhurst. Next,

most of them came directly from nomad or peasant families in a society unusually unified within itself so far as incipient class stratifications were concerned. They had joined the army because it was part of Somali tradition to become a fighting man, part of that influence which derived from the old nomad customs of raid and skirmish; also, it was often the only way out of village or herding life. Much remains to be understood about these motivations, but the general picture is clear enough.⁶ They went to the Soviet Union, and some of them came back with radical ideas, or, at least, with an awareness that practical alternatives to the Western model existed in the world. Among these was Major-General **Muhamad Siad Barre**, army commander and leader of the take-over of 1969, and President of Somalia since then: a man from a peasant family who was soon to show a powerful ability to think for himself and to act on what he thought. And he was not, as it fell out, the only one of his kind.

Another and different radical trend was also present. It had long been so, here we are into very sparsely documented territory. But it stands on the record that a section of the Italian Communist Party⁷ was formed in Mogadishu, the Somali capital, during 1942 after British military occupation, and was allowed by the British authorities to exist until about 1946. Its members, whoever they were, appear to have made contact with the leaders of the Somali Youth League, who were at that time also receiving benevolent attention from the British administration, as being those who were likely to inherit power when the war was over. (As it happened, they had to wait a long time for the inheritance.) How far those obscure Italian communists were able to spread Marxist ideas among young Somali nationalists of the forties is a question that probably cannot be answered. After the war they were rapidly silenced or sent to Italy. But it appears that they left something behind.

However that may be, there were quite a few Somali students by the sixties who were very interested in knowing what the practical alternative might be, and whose thought developed on Marxist lines. Some of them were educated in the Soviet Union, some in the USA, others in Italy or France, one at LSE. By the end of the neo-colonial decade they formed a small but coherent group among whom several were clearly of outstanding talent and determination. Moving easily across the "lines" of Somali society, **Siad Barre** and his military colleagues found that they had much in common with this group. A change was absolutely necessary; but what should it be? By 1969 **Siad Barre** and his subsidiary commanders knew that they could and would take over control of the state. They asked the **leftwing** former students to help them with ideas and advice. Out of this integral co-operation there has come the revolutionary programme of today.

The take-over was made with **Siad's** characteristic drive and attention to detail. He carried with him all the senior army officers and enough of

the senior police commanders. There was no shooting and the thing was over in a matter of hours. The parliamentary regime collapsed like an empty sack, and by all accounts to the vivid joy of most of the population.

All the same, it was a military take-over, and the resultant government was a form of military dictatorship. Even given the presence of radical ideas and the crying need for a practical alternative, how would one get from there to any kind of democratising transformation?

For a while, things went slowly. Through more than a year this new government contented itself with getting some unity and public accountability into an administration sunk in habits which presumed neither. But only for a while.



Ideas were meanwhile maturing.

Judged by the results that one may inspect today (January-February 1975), these ideas can be resumed in two statements made a little later. One is from *Stella d'Ottobre*, newspaper of the new regime, published on 4 May 1971 but certainly reflecting ideas already dominant. "The democratisation of political power," this said, "is the only way to interrupt the course of capitalism, and to develop our national productive forces, with the people becoming participants in the political and economic management of the nation."

The prescription could seem banal, but not to anyone familiar with Somalia and its history since the 1890s. There had been participation in pre-colonial times, but then, in any modern sense, there had been no nation. The colonial powers, beginning more or less with the turn of the century, had pushed their military rule into the unknown lands behind the coast, taking wherever they went all the political and economic power into their own hands. They did not find this easy. The Italians suffered some smart defeats. The British for twenty years after 1900 were met by a memorable adversary in the northern leader, **Muhamad Abdille Hasan**. In their jolly public-school way they dubbed him the "Mad Mullah", but he was anything except mad. A skilled political unifier and guerrilla commander, he was also a poet in a people of poets, and is more remembered for his poetry, perhaps, than for his warfare.

Eventually the colonial powers prevailed, and installed their administration. This allowed for no participation save by colonial-nominated Somali "chiefs" who were generally nothing of the kind, and in any case were puppets of their colonial officers. Aside from that, the colonial powers found it well to leave the nomad populations strictly to their own devices, while intervening now and then to stop feuds or punish offenders. In "trusteeship Somalia", 1950-60, the Italians simply continued their autocracy as before.

So did the parliamentary regime after 1960, except for displacing foreign by Somali personnel. National government became the monopoly of the ruling *élite*, modified by the push and pull of sectional interests represented by this or that "party". No post-colonial forms of local government were introduced, nor could they be, for democratic forms of local government would have undermined the whole fabric of *mussoqmassuq*. "Before the revolution was born in 1969", a chairman of one of the new local-government committees of the southern town of Jemaame said to me, "this town was ruled by one man, called the District Officer. It was one-man rule. We had three deputies in parliament. They used to come down here every few years to get themselves re-elected. Then they went away again. Today it is quite different. . ." How different will be seen. But the case of Jemaame in the parliamentary regime was manifestly characteristic of all places of settlement, as volumes of evidence could be adduced to prove. The parliamentary regime excluded every process of democratisation. There was no participation. *Stella d'Ottobre's* statement was already, therefore, a call for structural revolution.

The second statement particularly useful in explaining the ideas that were maturing in 1969 and immediately after is from **Muhamad Siad Barre**, a president who believes in saying what he thinks, and is also unusually good at saying it:

The important thing, much more than recriminating against the past, are the lessons taught by our experience. These lessons once more confirm our conviction **that** any attempt to break away from **under-development** must also break away from previously established values

Tribalism and regionalism were among those values. So were the privileges dealt out to individuals and groups with the precise intention of forming a local bourgeoisie, of perpetuating unjust and unequal relations between the country and the town, between peasants or stockraisers and the population of the towns.

And then there was another part of that system of values: the insistence on making us believe that Somalia was poor in intellectual resources, and that nothing could be changed without the pragmatic intelligence, technological knowledge and benevolent protection of the West. . .

Therefore the principal intention of our revolution has been to mobilise the masses of our people in order to face the problems that concern them. What we had to do was to make the politics and the economy of our country independent; restore to the people the effective political management of the nation; fight against unemployment, sickness, illiteracy; and participate with energy in the liberation of our continent from colonialism and from **neo-colonialism**.

These ideas matured in 1970 at a time when Siad's government had yet to declare itself as clearly as this, or to formalise its revolutionary intentions. The parliamentary regime had collapsed from one day to the next, but there were still those among its *Clite* who thought that something might still be saved to their advantage. A minor *coup* was frustrated. A little later, in 1971, a more determined repetition met the same fate. Buzzings of

dissent among some of the *wadadda*, a generic term with much the same sense as *'ulama* in West Africa—broadly, leaders of Islam—had to be met with strenuous disputation in terms of Quranic texts. It became known, for instance, that a Somali script in a Latin alphabet was in official preparation: wasn't this a betrayal of Somali Islam to the infidels? Nobody more than Siad seems to have entered upon these Quranic debates with better zeal or preparation; later, he would do the same with some of his bigoted presidential colleagues in the Arab League, to which Somali would afterwards adhere as already, of course, to the Organisation of African Unity whose chairman President Siad was in 1974-75. Colonel Gadaffy is not the only one, or so it is said (though Siad himself says nothing on this subject), to have found the Quran quoted against him.

The "second charter" came out in January 1971 with its dedication to "scientific socialism" as Somalia's "orbit of reference", and marked the onset of a programme of far-reaching change. By this time the new regime knew where it wanted to go, and more or less how it meant to go there. In settling these issues the *leftwing* intellectuals—but they would resist the "intellectual" label—had played a key role, and they now became organised leaders of the regime and government. A persistent interplay between the two components, the military and the civilian, produced a programmatic synthesis acceptable to each, though not without dissensions and resentments which continue, and which, without Siad's skilful chairmanship, might still prove fatal.

One finds the evidence of this interplay in what happened after January 1971. One finds it in what happens now. One finds it in the kind of ministerial, advisory, or administrative positions occupied by such men and women as Muhamad Aden Shek, Ali Warsama, Faduma Ahmad, Yusuf Weirah, Jamaa Rabile, or the brilliant minister of education, Muhamad Hasan Aden, who was tragically killed in a car crash in February this year. One finds it also in the kind of personal relations they enjoy with Siad and other military men who form the senior organ of the state, the Supreme Revolutionary Council. No doubt there are tensions of policy or personality here and there; one or two are obvious enough. But, so far, they have manifestly not prevented steady movement towards a political regime of a democratic and therefore revolutionary nature. One's impression is that it is Siad's own style of thought and action, above all, which has ensured this.

A man in his late fifties, of great self-confidence and sense of purpose, large of frame and easy-going of manner, universally referred to as the "Old Man" by ministers and advisers who are mostly in their thirties (one finds him chatting with them deep into the night), Siad reveals himself in conversation as a soldier who has long convinced himself that politics should be the art of social transformation, and as a man who, beneath the affectation of a "peasant simplicity", is well possessed of a realist and very

practical grasp of what such politics must or may entail. His published speeches have been interesting not only for their content, or for other obvious reasons, but also for the progression of themes developed over six years."

These themes were thought out before 1971 or even before 1969, and have to do with the nature of Somalia's practical alternative. They emphasise in one way or another that Siad's socialism is one that stems from Marx. Specifically diverse in its forms, its principles can be encapsulated in a simple opposition: "There are only two social systems in the world, and there is not a third." Towards capitalism or towards socialism: the rest is either illusion or local diversity. Thus, for the illusion: "Our socialism cannot be called Somali socialism, or African socialism, or Islamic socialism." Or, for the diversity: "Socialist revolutions cannot be imported. Every nation must consider its unique social and political structure, and adapt this to the general principles of scientific socialism. . . Our socialism is independent and is governed by its own specific conditions so as to set up a society based on equality, social justice, and unity. . ." Success depends therefore on understanding these specific conditions, and discovering how to operate within them so as to promote the desired ends. One finds oneself thinking repeatedly of Amilcar Cabral and of some other leaders of the liberation movements in the "Portuguese territories": Siad's thought and practice, and those of his comrades, are often remarkably parallel.⁹



Here it is possible to sketch only a few of the developments that followed January 1971. As a necessary prelude to a new structure, banks and insurance companies and various odds and ends of foreign ownership were taken into national ownership. An exception was made for the Italian-owned banana plantations of the south. Their exports were important in the balance of payments. But a ban was placed on new foreign enterprise in this crop, and it was foreseen that Italian ownership could be gradually phased out. State capitalism, in any case, was not in the regime's plans. It would have to persist for a time. Its transformation into democratic control would obviously be difficult; but it would obviously be necessary. Nationalisation could otherwise mean nothing to the greater part of Somali society; nor could it, especially in Somali circumstances, avoid a new form of elitist rule.

To get beyond state capitalism and its perils, it was further argued, the need was to "take the state" to the masses, even to the most retiring of elusive nomads, and, working along, to find and apply ways of involving the masses in the daily responsibility of running their own state, including their own farms and factories. It must take a lot of time, initiative and originality to achieve that result; and none of Somalia's leaders or thinkers

would claim, I think, that the process of achieving it is now in anything but an elementary stage. Certainly, none claimed this to me. But without suggesting that anything is irreversible, or guaranteed, much less utopian, this is the process of democratisation that was envisaged, and this is the process one may see at work today.

What Siad has called "the break with previously established values"⁹—the values, that is, of the colonial and neo-colonial periods but also, in certain crucial fields, of traditional Somalia as well—has taken shape since 1971 in a number of major campaigns. Two or three of these can be outlined here. Their objective was and has remained a dual one: to overcome inherited handicaps to a genuine national development, but to do this by evoking the participation of the masses. The start, in this latter respect, had to be practically from zero. There was no mass participation on the scene. There were no organisational means of evoking it. In this context the parallel was very much with that of the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies when they first began their struggle, and had the infinitely difficult and testing task of transforming mere sympathisers into active participants.¹⁰

The basic structures for this task consist now of two channels of initiative and response. The first is the executive structure of a Supreme Revolutionary Council repeated downwards to subordinate revolutionary councils at regional, district, and lesser levels. The second began in 1970 in an embryonic form. This was a Public Relations Office aimed at political explanation and education, once again structured as a central office in Mogadishu repeated downwards to regions, districts, towns and villages. After a while, with a painful dearth of political cadres beginning to be a little relieved, this PRO was transformed into a Political Office, similarly structured but on a more elaborate scale. Its tasks have emerged as three in number. The first task is to carry on the work of political explanation and education. The second is to act as a two-way channel of liaison, level by level, between the leadership and all the settled populations, whether urban or agricultural. The third is to encourage and supervise the formation and development of an extremely complex network of representative committees of self-rule. Autonomous responsibilities began to be transferred to these committees in 1973. This transfer continues.

In the course of time, and probably in the next year or so, the Political Office and its ramifications are billed for further transformation into the political party of the revolution. In essence, they already begin to function as that. But the paucity of adequately formed cadres remains acute. For an outsider it is impossible to judge just how acute, especially after a short visit. One finds cadres in key positions who are repeatedly impressive. Generally, things seem much as one might expect: some cadres are good, but many are not. Their numbers, in any case, are still few, and their formation tends to be simplistic. How far they may see themselves as a governing élite, at least for the future, is another question to which I can

offer no answer, except that the present situation, in all its implications, does not easily lend itself to ossification.

There are several reasons why it does not do that. One of them, and perhaps the crucial one, lies precisely in the development of representative committees of self-rule. They are by far the most interesting aspect of Somalia today.

* * *

It was possible in a few weeks to have discussions with committees in different towns and large villages, and with several dozen of their men and women members. These discussions were mostly conducted by interpretation from Somali, though sometimes directly in English or Italian, and ranged over many hours and topics. They were very relaxed once the ice was broken, undertaken without official supervision, and open-ended as to subject. Questions tended to go both ways.

The southern town of Jemaame is characteristic, I think, of the general picture. Jemaame is a community today of about 16,000 people. Close by, lined with majestic mangoes, the Juba river flows generously even in the worst of droughts: irrigation along its banks has long developed a comparatively rich agriculture, but mosquitoes are a curse. The town itself has lately come to life with new asphalt roads and public buildings constructed largely through local self-help schemes, the people contributing their labour, the government free construction materials and advice.

For purposes of local government, the town is divided into two sectors, each with about 8,000 people. Their link with the executive is still a District Officer. (He proved to be another young graduate with radical convictions.) But this District Officer has a different status from the old one of the parliamentary regime. He is the chairman of a local revolutionary council, and working with him, apart from his own officials, there are eight sector committees, four for each of the two sectors, with fifteen men and women on each committee. Beyond these eight sector committees, all of which I met, there are sixteen sub-sector committees, and again, below these, other committees representing still smaller units of population. "Around Jemaame, for example," a committee member explained, "we also have thirty-two small villages. Each has its own committees, each rules itself. Each proposes a yearly plan for its own development, and passes this up for discussion." No doubt the whole structure is scarcely as neat as that.

These committees invariably consist of men and women from their own sectors and sub-sectors. Their central place of meeting is called the "Orientation Centre". You find such orientation centres in every town or large village. The people have built these centres for themselves. Each is a more or less wide enclosed space within a white wall, big enough for outdoor meetings and to contain small rooms for sector committees and a

room for the local representatives of the Political Office. Often the meeting place is marked out for basket ball, which seems to be a Somali addiction; and one wall is built high enough for outdoor cinema shows. Posters or wall pictures exhorting to success in this or that campaign, or warning against this or that political danger, reveal a healthy upsurge of political art. By the time of my visit these centres had obviously become much more than political instruments. People use them as evening clubs, as daytime nurseries for babies, for games, concerts, poetry recitals (another Somali addiction), dances, and the like. In Jemaame we walked from one centre to the other, so as to meet the sector committees, amid a joyful cloud of excited children and approving mothers.

Such committees are not yet elective, and probably cannot become so for some time to come. But those that I questioned were undoubtedly representative of the jobs and people of their localities. They are also representative by being large in number, strictly local in selection, and selected in order to speak especially for three main segments that compose the settled population: wage-earners (including self-employed artisans and small traders), young people under about eighteen, and women. They are concerned with local development (building a new market; making a better refuse system; adding this or that improvement by self-help schemes undertaken with government aid; all such matters); with local law and order, for the keeping of which they have their own volunteer "force", the Gulwadayal; with the promotion of major national campaigns such as the drive for literacy in Somali; and with political education and explanation.

In other words, they are organs for and of mass participation. And that the word "mass" is not misused in this context one may see from their numbers as well as from their composition. In the northern town of Hargeisa, for example, committees with a membership totalling **1,200** men and women are engaged in looking after the daily **affairs** of a community of about **80,000**. In Kismaayo, far in the south, the proportion turned out to be **1,200** to about **50,000**. I think these are much the proportions to be found in all settled places. And these totals of committee members refer only to the sector and sub-sector committees, not counting all those lesser committees formed in the smallest settled units.

That is one aspect of the process now in play. The liberation of women is another aspect.

Somalia has always oppressed its women by local prejudice and local Muslim precept. This oppression is now being fought by orders "from the top" and by women's action from below.

What you find throughout settled Somalia today is something that all agree was virtually unthinkable under any previous regime. Women are now organised in their own interests, and right down to the smallest units of settlement, by committees of their fellow-women, of their neighbours, sitting as equals with other committees of local self-rule on which women

also sit. I had discussions with several such women's committees. And although all agree that there is still a long way to go, for the oppression has been severe, all-embracing, long accepted as "right and natural", so that many have yet to gain confidence, others fail to respond, and not everyone is ready to brave the frowns of tradition, the general process of liberation is already startlingly clear.

"In our country", a woman committee-member said to me in Hargeisa, "we've always had many responsibilities. We've been the hut-makers, the weavers, the cooks, even the cattle grazers. Everyone knows that. But these responsibilities weren't recognised. We were still nothing. Or when visitors like you came, it was the men who talked, and behind closed doors, we couldn't even listen. You can see, it's different now. Because our revolution is for real and active participation by women as well as men."

There is said to be equal pay. Is it true?

"Yes, it is true, we get it," said another women committee-member who is also a schoolteacher. Other women said the same during other interviews.

During a discussion with the fifteen members of the women's committee of one of the four sectors of Kismaayo, one of them said: "Our job means we keep in constant touch with the developments and activities of our own sector, and of other sectors. We pass on the decisions of the Revolution [i.e. of the Supreme Revolutionary Council by way of their local revolutionary council] to our sub-sector committees, and they pass them down again. And what they are doing and thinking comes back up to us. Their activities, their needs, questions about better ways of political orientation. They discuss all that, and so do we." This emphasis on the committee structure's being a two-way channel was a repeated one, though it came out as something not stated as such, but as an obviously integral part of the way they worked. "Apart from the decisions that we pass down, we also have the responsibility of mobilising our community, of raising political consciousness, of getting all our women to take part.. ." On literacy, a member of this Kismaayo committee said: "None of us here could read or write before. Now all of us can. . ." It appeared to be the general experience of women who work on the committees.

This January the revolution's challenge to tradition was carried a step further with a decree providing that females shall inherit equally with males. "Long overdue", drily commented a woman committee-member in Hargeisa, "and we all knew that. But it will help." This was the revolution's strongest challenge to Somali Muslim custom, stronger even than the writing of Somali in a Latin alphabet; and one need hardly add that not everyone liked the decree and its implications. There were mosques that buzzed with masculine indignation and with strong speeches about an "infidel government". This could be no laughing matter at the best of times, but the government's reaction was an implacable one. Of

those arrested and tried for serious sedition, ten men were executed and others sentenced to long terms.

In these sentences one could see both the strength and the weakness of the present stage of development. The strength is that the new regime is determined to act, wherever necessary, against traditional or religious prejudice; the weakness, evidently, is that it feels it cannot afford to allow such prejudice the smallest leeway. In judging the severity of these sentences and what lay behind them, it may be fair to add that there was much serious talk of foreign intrigue set in motion by certain (un-named) northern neighbours; and in this respect one certainly needs to remember that Somalia is the only member of the Arab League, as yet, to have gone all out for women's rights, or, come to that, for a programme of consistent social change based on Marxist principles. The sentences would also seem to point to a fairly acute conflict; but here again it is fair to add that none appeared at the time, save in several mosques immediately after the decree declaring that females should inherit equally with males. Within a week or so the "anti-women agitation" seemed to have blown over, at least in public.

The democratisation of local government, large improvements in the status of women, a greatly enlarged and reformed school system: these and other such changes deeply affect the settled populations of Somalia, But what happens with the nomads who are not settled, who are anything but settled, for whom settlement is quite the wrong way to live, but who make up at least three-fifths of the Somali people?

* * *

Up to a very recent past the nomads could scarcely be said to have belonged to the Somali state in any integral or effective way. The nomads had certainly been "there"; but in most practical ways they had also not been there. When threatened by tax collectors, they had taken down their huts and slipped across a far horizon. When approached by government medical officers or other such, they had vanished as soon as they were able.

The appalling droughts of the present moment have already gone far to change all this. But the revolutionary regime could not in any case, quite apart from the consequences of drought, accept a situation in which some three-fifths of the population stayed outside the orbit of social change. If it was necessary to "take the state" to the settled masses, the need to take it to the nomads was evidently no smaller. A principal way of doing this has been the literacy campaign.

An agreed script for Somali was produced in 1972. It was designed to be as simple as possible, and therefore easily learned. All accents were avoided, long vowels being simply doubled single vowels and tonal changes left unmarked: it can be written, for example, on an unadapted Italian or English typewriter. In 1973 there followed an intensive literacy campaign

among the settled populations. That went well, and taught some useful lessons besides literacy. In mid-1974, enriched with this experience, the revolution began "taking the state" to the nomads by taking them literacy.

The method chosen was characteristic of this regime concerned so greatly with participation. Since nomads live in widely scattered groups or families, thousands of teachers had to be found. Tens of thousands were found. This was done by closing the last two (intermediate) classes of the primary schools and the first three classes of the secondary schools. Most students thus released, together with most of their teachers, were given a crash course in teaching how to read and write Somali (which they, of course, had already learned to do), and were asked to go and spend eight months with the nomads, with their teachers to supervise and help them.

At the same time they were given some elementary instruction in simple rules of hygiene, and, a little later, the additional task of taking the first-ever census of nomad people and nomad livestock, something that no previous regime had ever even thought that it could do. Many of these students were coming back while I was there, and with many tales to tell. When they had reached the nomads, in their trucks, their teachers had said to the nomads: "These are your children. They have come to help you. They will do you no harm." And all accounts agree that the nomads responded to this singularly disarming approach, taking the student-teachers into their own families, and even asking them, as the months went by, to celebrate marriages or adjudicate in small disputes. And if the students missed a year, or are now delayed a year, they have gained something else. "They have learned more about their own country in these months," said a senior inspector of education whom I met on tour in the nomad lands of Burao District, "than they ever could have done by years at school."

So it is that the state has been taken to the nomads not by tax collectors or district officers, but by school children. Preliminary inspection of literacy examination papers, thick rolls of which were beginning to arrive back in towns when I was there, are said to be encouragingly good. "Continuation classes" are now being organised with teaching by the brightest of the new literates. They will assemble under the shade of a convenient tree, just as one saw them during the recent campaign, and they will go on learning, the old and the young alike. Throughout the whole Somali population it appears now that literacy has already risen from zero to more than fifty per cent in two years. The proportion would be considerably higher but for the fearful distractions of the drought.

Literacy has to be among the crucial keys to social change. But with a large proportion of Somali nomads, literacy will now form part of their lifeline to survival. For the literacy campaign coincided, in its closing stages, with what is now seen to be the greatest natural disaster in Somali history. The world of "sheiks and warriors", the old world of Somali

tradition, has reached the end of the road.

* * *

Except in 1972, Somalia in March 1975 had received no normal rainfall since 1969. Becoming very serious at the end of 1974, the present drought could not in any case end before May or June. Early in the new year the news was such that the government set about equipping many relief camps. By the first days of February some 130,000 nomads had reached these centres. Here they were assured of food and water and medical aid, all of which they desperately needed, as well as of continued literacy teaching and other means of adaptation to what must be a different way of life. Here, too, committees of self-rule and self-help quickly sprang to life.

What would be the eventual total in the camps? Late in January, Beer camp of the very hard-hit Burao District already had some 32,000 nomads. I put my question to the grave camp director. He shakes his head. "They are coming in now at the rate of 500 or more each day. There are many more to come." They come in as we talk. Many arrive in relief trucks sent to find them. Others struggle in on foot. Most are in very poor condition. All are destitute. Whitening bones along the trails of the Ogo, of the "roof" of Somalia, are what is left of their livestock. Here and there camels have survived. But otherwise the disaster is almost complete.

In March it was thought that at least 750,000 nomads would have reached the centres before good rains could possibly fall; and it was feared that the eventual total might be as many as a million, or a third of all Somalia's people. By then the country would have lost, on the most conservative estimate, a large fraction of all its livestock. Yet the disaster had already gone far beyond the death of animals. Several thousand people had died in the wilderness. Immense areas of northern and north-eastern Somalia are reduced to little better than desert, and cannot possibly provide grazing for many years to come.

What or who has been to blame for this catastrophe? Climatic change appears to have altered the rainfall pattern. One severe drought has followed close upon another in a way that no-one can remember. Human improvidence has also played its part. Gross overstocking of sheep was encouraged during the 1960s by rising prices. This led to the installation of a multitude of cement tank-reservoirs; this, in turn, to more overstocking. In the 1960s there was plenty of money to be made from such tanks. Installing them evidently became "big business": often, the business of parliamentary deputies who sold their votes for tank permits, and who built tanks with embezzled government funds.

"Yet it can't be said," President Siad remarked in conversation, "that we have not dealt effectively with human responsibilities for past degradation of our land." The revolutionary government soon clapped a ban on the installation of tanks. But the damage was done. In Burao

District, for example, there was one such tank in **1954**. By the time the revolutionary government could apply its ban, Burao District had acquired no fewer than 18,000 of these tanks. All of them by early 1975 were long since void of water, and the flocks that they supported have perished. Most will have to be destroyed. Thousands of square miles will have to be conserved for eventual restoration.

Immediate foreign aid in relief was vital, whether in medical supplies and teams or in free cereal imports. But immediate help, even if it came, could not solve the wider problem of fighting the present rate of desertification, and of giving nomads a less precarious way of life. That could be done only by persuading many nomad populations to give up their ancestral wanderings, and to become settled cultivators, like nomad groups before them, in the watered lands along the Juba and **Shebelle** rivers. Fortunately there is plenty of room for them down there. Other nomads will have to overcome their abhorrence of fish. "A lot of our nomads, and we are all of us nomads by ancestry," a Somali historian said to me, "will have to go and live besides our seas. Learn to build and sail boats. Find out how to catch fish. And eat fish. They won't like it at first, but they'll find it's quite possible."

This is where the literacy campaign acquired a new value. For it will prove to be an historical fact of magnitude, for Somalia, that the state was taken to the nomads, in ways acceptable to the nomads, at the very moment when the nomads need the state as they have never needed it before. Nobody could sensibly say that the drought has been a blessing in disguise; its destructive scale has been far too great. All the same, something useful might be got from it: as Cabral would have said, "a weakness can be turned into a strength". And this has been the revolutionary government's conviction.

A strongly viable economy would have to be, in the first place, a far more independently steered economy than was ever thinkable within the leading strings accepted by the parliamentary regime. And there is little doubt, I think, that one of the chief reasons for the popularity of this revolutionary regime is that it has worked, consistently and obviously, for a clear independence of thought and action. This is not, of course, what our cold-war "experts" and babblers have wished to recognise, much less admit. By an all too familiar process of propaganda, they have pointed to a steady flow of Soviet aid and suggested that Somalia is undergoing a process of "Soviet satellitization".¹¹

Such fantasies need not perhaps detain us; but it may be useful to say something about the real position in so far as a visitor can define it. Formally, the regime is "positively neutral", and conversations with Somali leaders from Siad downwards made it very clear that this position is intended to be taken seriously. If the Russians have some naval facilities at the port of Berbera, on the Gulf of Aden, while the army rests firmly on

Soviet military training and equipment, the fact remains that this regime is an intensely patriotic one with close attachments both to the Organisation of African Unity (of which President Siad is this year's chairman) and the Arab League. Any process of "satellitization" would at once quarrel with all three attachments, and would in any case be evident in ways that one simply does not find.

The Russians give some economic aid to this regime (as they gave it to the parliamentary regime as well), and so do the Chinese, who are at present building a major north-south highway. In relief against the present drought one can also add that capitalist countries have given aid; Britain, for example, has contributed six Land Rovers and four water trailers with a quantity of water-storage containers, and will pay £450,000 towards our share of the food aid pledged by the EEC (mainly for cereals). As between the Russians and the Chinese one has a pretty firm impression that the Somali leadership leans towards the first rather than the second, but in this their position is again very much like that of FRELIMO and its sister-movements: the Somalis are realists, like them, and have no wish to involve themselves in matters whose outcome must remain so absolutely beyond any influence of theirs. If they speak their minds on this subject, it is strictly to themselves.

No process of "satellitization" could in any case be consonant with the programme of the regime. For what one finds, on the spot, is that Somalia is being "Somalised" in the decisive (and, over the past eighty years, unprecedented) sense that its institutions begin to reflect a profound and all-embracing popular involvement: just as do, incidentally, those of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. And one quickly sees that only this kind of involvement, only this degree of authenticity of independent thought and action, could possibly give this people a real chance to face and solve their present problems.

The "nomad problem" of the drought illustrates this in the most direct way imaginable. A strongly viable Somali economy has to mean, aside from independence of decision, that there must be far fewer nomads and many more cultivators, fishermen, artisans in a variety of skills. But how do you persuade the nomads of this? As it happens, this is what the drought has done: very painfully, perhaps, but also very effectively. Great numbers of nomads now know by crippling and sometimes terrible experience that they must find another way to live. For by early this year it was plain that they can have no other alternative except to go back to lands which will no longer yield grazing, even if rains fall abundantly, and for which, in any case, they no longer possess any livestock. So they must change their way of life. They must become involved in the affairs of settled Somalia in entirely new and permanent ways. They must learn to participate in running the state that has saved their lives.

Happily for them, they are blessed now with leaders who had under-

stood all this even before the most recent drought displayed its full hostility. But with the continuance of drought, these leaders have given fresh proof of being able to think long and think large. While the nomads have been reaching their conclusion about the need for a new way of life, so has the revolutionary government been completing its plans to enable them to find one.

No doubt the problems of settling great numbers of nomads are formidable. But so are the human and political capacities mobilised this year to meet these problems. Such problems of readaptation can be solved effectively only by persuasion and co-operation, and most obviously of all when dealing with a people whose traditional ways have evoked a fierce individualism. Yet the fact is that persuasion and co-operation are precisely the methods of government, the aims of politics, the purposes of organisation, which encapsulate the meaning of this revolution.

A reasonable scepticism will still ask if a regime originating in a military take-over, especially in a country with no existing democratic structure of a modern kind, can really develop such methods, aims, and purposes? The evidence suggests that this one has; and it suggests this at all the crucial points where one may at present test such evidence. Which is not to say—but need one really make this point?—that the road ahead will not still remain a hard one. No doubt there are moments when a visitor can find himself wondering if the habits of military command, which are always liable to include the habits of "military justice", may not become ingrained in the habits of this revolution. In January, as we have seen, ten men were found guilty of dangerous sedition, on the occasion of agitations against the decree on women's rights, and were executed. Others were given long prison sentences for having taken a lesser part in those evidently brief agitations. Why this extreme severity unjustifiable by the published evidence? The full answer to this question would be all the more interesting, if it were available, because this revolutionary regime has shown itself averse to any policy or practice of vengeance or repressive violence. It would be found to rest, perhaps, on the ground of two related sorts of explanation: first, of a certain traditional severity in Somali culture towards all those who break the rules of a society framed in toughness by the very facts of its existence and survival; and, secondly, of an acute awareness of the strength of Muslim conservatism in this country—with the dangers that this conservatism may present at a time when mass democratisation has still to become mature.

Or the visitor may wonder, on quite another plane, if trends in the direction of bureaucratic sclerosis, party sclerosis, that seem "natural and inherent" to all great processes of transformation of structure are now sufficiently perceived, and, being perceived, will be sufficiently guarded against: so that the *wadadda* of old are not displaced by a new kind of *wadadda* and a new kind of conformism. My strong impression is that this

is not what is happening now: on the contrary, what appears to be happening now is the emergence on the public scene of government of large numbers of men and women who are not in the least *wadadda*, not in the least an elite of any sort. All the same, history's warnings on this subject are sharp and painful in relation to revolutionary parties, especially in countries with a very weak or small working class; and these warnings are certainly there to be remembered. Or, again, the visitor may wonder if the singularity of the Somali experience, just because it is in many ways an heroic experience, an heroic *national* experience, may not in time present another kind of nationalist trap, closing doors to the relevant experience of others, closing minds to criticism, closing mouths to self-criticism. It would be arrogant in a visitor to do more than wonder such things, given the contrary evidence that he finds. But it would also be unrealistic. At this time of day, after all, the wondering is part of a proper humility. *Insh'allah!*

Meanwhile the visitor will set such wonderings against the observable facts and gains. And the observable facts and gains show, and in very convincing ways, the present unfolding of a process of independent and constructive change, a process of widening participation, a process of genuine democratisation. These facts and gains suggest that Somalia can and does offer some valid and original answers to the questions that now matter most to Africa, and not by any means only to Africa. If not towards capitalism in any of its derivatives or simulacra, then, in practice, towards what? And, in practice, how?

NOTES

1. J. Suret-Canale, *La Pensée*, no 117, October 1964; C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, *La Pensée*, no 144, April, 1969.
2. For a brief review of the evidence and the argument, see my *Can Africa Survive? Arguments against Growth without Development* (Heinemann, 1975).
3. A copious descriptive bibliography. For their own theses and conclusions, see especially Amílcar Cabral: *Unité et Lutte*, Vol. I, *L'Arme de la Théorie*; Vol. 2, *La Pratique Révolutionnaire*, Maspero, Paris, 1975. Both of these remarkable and remarkably comprehensive volumes call for English editions as soon as possible.
4. Useful background books include: I.M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, OUP, 1961; Ibid. "From Nomadism to Cultivation: the expansion of political solidarity in Southern Somalia", in *Man in Africa*, ed. M. Douglas and P.M. Kaberry, Tavistock, 1969; B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, OUP, 1964; R.L. Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia*, U. of Chicago Press, 1966.
5. Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, as recorded by Kenneth King (OUP, 1973), p. 248.
6. See a very useful book by L. Pestalozza, *Somalia, Cronaca della Rivoluzione* (Dedalo Libri, Bari, 1973) for a great deal of valuable documentation on the early years of the revolutionary regime.
7. Probably an autonomous section, for no records of it are to be found at the

Istituto Gramsci in Rome, and I was informed there that none existed.

8. A selection of Siad's speeches is available in English, though not well translated and sometimes in oddly truncated form, in Jaalle Major-General **Muhamad Siad Barre: *My Country and My People*** (Mogadishu, June 1974). The Somali Embassy in London presumably has copies. See also Pestalozza, op. cit.
9. Especially as shown in the field of theory, by comparing these and many other statements of Siad's with one of Cabral's master statements, "The Weapon of Theory" (1966) in A. Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea* (Stage One, London, 1969).
10. Cf. Cabral in 1968: "This political preparation is the toughest, most daunting but also most important aspect of the whole campaign for national liberation. . . . But without it, nothing of lasting value can be done", quoted in B. Davidson *The Liberation of Guiné* (Penguin, London, 1969), p. 52.
11. **As**, for example, in a recent pamphlet issued by Mr. Brian Crozier and his far-right wing 'Institute for the Study of Social Conflict', much publicised in *The Times* etc.