

This article was downloaded by: [University of Oxford]

On: 5 August 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 795343510]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Review of African Political Economy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713443496>

Whose Democracy? Bourgeois versus popular democracy

Björn Beckman

To cite this Article Beckman, Björn(1989) 'Whose Democracy? Bourgeois versus popular democracy', Review of African Political Economy, 16: 45, 84 – 97

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/03056248908703828

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056248908703828>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

accountability, including problems of corruption and efforts to introduce leadership and investment codes. Again, these are issues central to the struggles of the whole continent.

* * *

Whose Democracy? Bourgeois versus Popular Democracy

Björn Beckman

Authoritarianism, militarism and repression dominate the African political scene. What are the prospects and frontiers of democratic advance? Is liberal democracy a viable option under African conditions? Radical sceptics are joined by liberals who agree that it is not: Africa cannot have liberal or 'bourgeois' democracy so long as there is no proper bourgeoisie. In any case, is democracy really a priority? This essay reviews the critique developed by African radical democrats and the support it has drawn from liberal and dependency analysis. What is the radical democratic option? The primary concern is how to capture state power; the breaking of the hold of ruling classes over the lives of the oppressed. Liberal democracy has not been given much place in such strategies and processes. This, however, is changing. Increasingly forces of the left have come to accept liberal democratic platforms and alliances as means of securing the survival of popular democratic organisations and to expand the 'democratic space'. Ultimately, it is a question of constructing the popular bases from which state power can be contested.

A Nigerian Point of Departure

The immediate context of this review of arguments for or against liberal democracy is the current debate within the Nigerian left on the process of transition to civilian rule, the Third Republic. The first collapsed in 1965, less than five years after independence, when Nigeria entered into a period of turmoil and civil war. After almost fifteen years of military rule the Second Republic was launched in 1979. It survived only four years before groups within the military again seized power in late 1983. After some infighting within the military, a new schedule for the return to civilian rule in 1992 was presented. An elaborate process of constitution-making was initiated, including a nation-wide 'political debate', and a new constitution was promulgated. The military government dictated that there should be a 'two-party system' and reserved for itself the right to choose the two parties to be so recognised.

How have radical democrats viewed the transition? In the early stage of the 'political debate', some insisted on a 'truly democratic system' where

popular and mass organisations (labour unions, peasant associations, youth and student organisations, professional bodies, the unemployed) should represent themselves *directly* in decision making bodies and assemblies (ASUU 1986).

This method, it was argued, would eliminate 'professional politicians who practice politics as profit making business'. Others wrote off the possibility of any meaningful political transition under the auspices of the present neo-colonial state and looked for allies among the radical factions within the military itself (on such 'military vanguardism', see Beckman in *ROAPE* 1986).

Jibrin Ibrahim (1987) noted that many of the left wing protagonists argued that Nigeria should either have

a popular one party socialist system, some form of corporate system based on representation of popular organisations or at the very least a two party system with a conservative capitalist party face to face with a socialist revolutionary party. This situation they argued would simplify and bring to the fore the ideological struggle and thereby hasten the transition to socialism .

The Nigerian labour movement was divided over how to relate to the new round of electoral politics. Some maintained that workers should join individually whatever party they thought would best look after their interests. Others argued for the formation of a Labour Party. Such a prospective party was launched in 1989 under the auspices of the leadership of the Nigerian Labour Congress (Olukoshi 1989). As the military government pressed ahead with its plans to impose a two-party system and pick 'the most representative' parties of its own choice, debates within the left further intensified. Was the electoral process meaningful at all? What sacrifices in terms of promising the state to be of 'good behaviour' were defensible in order to be permitted to remain in the electoral game? Some sections of the left opted for more or less individual strategies inside other parties that seemed to have a better chance of state acceptance. Others decided to stand back in disgust over such 'opportunism'. The debate on 'entryism', that is, whether the left should join or stay out of populist and 'petty-bourgeois' political parties, that had divided the left during the Second Republic, flared up again (Bako 1986).

The Nigerian left debate has been marked by ad hoc responses to the manipulation of the political process by the state. The positions taken by various left groupings, however, are also informed by conflicting views of parliamentary politics and 'bourgeois democracy'.

Liberal, Bourgeois and Popular Democracy

In a recent four volume study on *Democracy in Developing Countries*, the editors offer an 'authoritative' definition of democracy. For them it denotes a system of government that meets three conditions:

meaningful and extensive **competition** among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of **political participation** in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of **civil and political liberties** — freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations - sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1988:xvi).

I take this as a formulation of the ideal of liberal democracy. If used for the purpose of characterising the system of government in most actual democracies, such a 'definition' is of course highly problematic. What is 'meaningful and extensive'? What are 'all effective' positions of power? What is 'fair' and 'inclusive'? In the context of the sharply divided class societies, such attributes need to be discussed in relation to actual social agents: meaningful to whom? fair to whom? whose freedom? whose democracy?

The gap between liberal democratic theory and democratic practices is staggering. A distinction is often made within left arguments between liberal and bourgeois democracy, where the former represents the ideal and the latter stands for the realities of 'democracy' in societies dominated by the bourgeoisie. A bourgeois dominated polity may be more or less informed by the ideals of liberal democracy. The level of bourgeois political domination also varies with the strength of the popular democratic forces. In that sense, the notion of bourgeois democracy stands for a political system where the scope for effective popular participation and control over effective positions of government is very restricted. Accordingly, the notion of popular democracy suggests a system with a wide scope in this respect. I speak of radical democrats as those who want democracy of this latter type.

I use liberal democracy to refer to the system of institutions, procedures and formal rights (parties, elections, rights of association and expression) associated most commonly with the constitutional history of advanced capitalist countries. Many on the left would insist with Shadrack Gutto that there is nothing bourgeois or liberal about free elections and therefore think we should speak of democracy, pure and simple, without further qualification. Nevertheless, as long as a significant portion of the left, in Africa and elsewhere, think of the problems of democracy primarily in terms popular power and participation within ruling socialist or socialist-oriented one-party structures, the epithet 'liberal' may still be needed to distinguish the 'competitive', multi-party variety.

The Radical Critique of Liberal Democracy

Radical democrats in Africa have strong reasons for being unenthusiastic about liberal democracy. Referring to the Uganda case, Mamdani (1987:93) notes that 'all organised parties to the public discussion were agreed regarding the essence of democracy as a multiparty system with free and fair elections'. But such a narrow conception of political rights, while important in themselves, could have a meaning only to a minority in society.

Not only does it leave out of consideration the largest section of society, the bulk of its producers of wealth, the peasantry; the resulting political competition is also limited to an arena defined by the demands of the bourgeoisie (Mamdani 1987:93)

The most common view on the left is certainly that representative democratic institutions which are capable of catering for broad popular needs and aspirations are unlikely to emerge, at least in the foreseeable future. It is more likely that systems of representation will continue to serve narrow ruling class and bourgeois interests. Whatever little 'liberal democracy' is formally in sight is bound to be highly illiberal as well as bourgeois in class terms. Even where elections are not blatantly rigged, the outcome rarely qualifies as a meaningful expressions of the 'will of the people'.

Democracy, viewed as 'free and fair elections in strictly bourgeois terms' is not the answer, according to Anyang' Nyong'o, a Kenyan scholar. Taking Nigeria as an example, he suggests that at no time has the bourgeoisie 'thought it necessary to give more content to the democratic process and involve the popular masses in politics from below (1988a:78).

It is therefore not surprising that many radical democrats fail to take liberal democracy seriously as an avenue for advancing popular democratic power.

Moreover, the sheer inefficiency of current ruling class arrangements makes the parliamentary option extremely unattractive. Bourgeois class rule seems to have little to offer in the way of national development. No 'bourgeois revolution' is in sight. So why cooperate in an electoral game that confers constitutional legitimacy on a state that is likely to remain not only glaringly unrepresentative but also highly unproductive?

Radical democrats, it is argued, should not shed tears over the failure of 'bourgeois' democracy. Does the failure not merely reinforce the case for popular democracy and for the need to smash the neo-colonial state? In much of Africa, there is not even a pretence of seeking electoral legitimation for neo-colonial class rule. Even where elections are held, the veil cannot conceal the naked face of oppression. Does not the bankruptcy of liberal democracy in Africa reflect the bankruptcy of the neo-colonial political order itself?

The Poor Prospects of Liberal Democracy

Can radical democrats in Africa be expected to take liberal democracy seriously when liberals write it off? While third world democracy, according to Sandbrook (1988:240), is again 'in vogue', as attested by an avalanche of writings and the renewed interest shown by 'the large foundations', the prospects for African democracy continue to be dim. Most African countries, says Huntington (1984), 'are, by reason of their poverty or the violence of their politics, unlikely to move into a democratic direction'. Others have emphasised how colonial practices and the process of decolonisation favoured one-party or no-party states. 'To have expected democracy to flourish would have been historical blindness', notes Chabal (1986:5). 'It is not only that hopes for democracy seem to have faded completely,' he says 'The very basis of effective government seems scarcely to obtain in Africa today' (ibid, p.2).

One is tempted, says Sandbrook, to advocate democracy as a way out of the present crisis:

Realistically, though, our analysis does not suggest that democracy has any real prospect in the limiting conditions of contemporary Africa (Sandbrook 1985:157).

The best feasible alternative is therefore, in his view, 'decent, responsive and largely even-handed personal rule'. The real choice is between Houphouet-Boigny and Idi Amin. Neo-patrimonial authoritarianism, not democracy, is the order of the day. Ulf Himmelstrand, a former President of the International Sociological Association, scolds Kenyan exiles and in particular their gullible Swedish supporters, for not realising that by African standards the Kenyan regime represents a bright spot and that the 'tutelary political leadership' and 'moral exhortation' of the Moi type 'would seem to be absolutely necessary' to break the impasse of corruption that confronts the African state (Himmelstrand 1988, 1989).

While the predominant tendency in Western Africanist circles has been to dismiss liberal democracy, some scholars see some marginal openings, pointing in particular to the experience of the handful of countries that are considered to have a significant democratic record. Sandbrook has of late revised his position in this direction. While liberal democracy seems unlikely at first glance (compare above!),

representative democracies, or proto-democracies, have survived for more than a decade in such countries as Gambia, Senegal, Botswana and Mauritius whose objective conditions seem no more facilitative of democratization than those in many neighbouring authoritarian regimes (Sandbrook 1989:35. See also Sandbrook 1988)

The economic records of Botswana and Mauritius are among the best in sub-Saharan Africa while Gambia and Senegal are not among the worst performers. This suggests, according to Sandbrook (1989:36), that liberal democracy is at least not incompatible with successful development and that it can 'not be dismissed' as a way of breaking the pattern of political and economic decay, at least in the long term.

How convincing is such evidence of the viability of liberal democracy? Not very and, as we see, Sandbrook does not make any great claims. Most of the cases mentioned have small populations, strong one-party dominance, and other authoritarian and repressive features. These tattered liberal 'success stories' are more likely to confirm those left views that suggest that liberal democracy in the African context is not a serious option.

Democracy or Economic Development

How important is democracy, anyway? For many of the early African advocates of one-party or no-party rule, the national development project was too urgent and too sensitive to be exposed to the divisiveness of competitive party politics, a view which gained some support from scholars in the West. Economic development, it was argued, must come first and was likely to require authoritarian government. Some scholars, like Huntington (1968), were more brutally 'realistic' than others, but 'liberals' generally were quite ready to subordinate the case for liberal democracy to other developmental imperatives: order, stability, efficiency, growth, etc. The primacy of 'development', is reflected also in the way in which those who favour liberal democracy often feel obliged to support their case with reference to economic performance.

Such subordination of democracy to development is also reflected in various attempts to theorise forms of democracy that are more 'appropriate' to African conditions or adapted to the particular 'needs' of development and stability. The advocates of one-party systems have created a vast body of such theories. We have been told, for instance, why the Kenyan system of queuing-up behind candidates in the open rather than having secret ballots is more appropriate and African.

The adaptations have met with understanding from Western scholars concerned with development. A former president of the American African Studies Association, Richard Sklar (1983) advocated in his presidential address a 'developmental democracy', a synthesis of African experiences, including Kenya's 'guided democracy', Tanzania's 'social democracy', Zambia's 'participatory democracy', as well as Inkatha-supported 'consociational democracy' in South Africa. The liberal component in the synthesis is represented primarily by Nigerian federalism. In fact, with Kenyatta, Nyerere, Kaunda, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and Alahji Shehu Shagari all qualifying as contributors, such an alternative model of democracy becomes rather unattractive, whether from a liberal or a radical perspective.

The readiness to assign some democratic legitimacy to repressive and authoritarian regimes reflects both the view that Africa is not ripe for 'real' democracy and the 'developmental' priority. Confronted with such 'liberal' positions, radical democrats in Africa may feel that they have little reason to be apologetic about their search for alternative forms of popular representation and accountability linked to their own projects for national development and national unity.

Yet the left too is influenced by this lack of ruling class commitment to liberal solutions. In the current Nigerian 'transition to civilian rule', for instance, ruling class ideas of a state-imposed two-party system was accepted by sections within the left who entertained hopes that they might be able to capture one of the two (cf. Ibrahim 1987). In Nigeria, as in much of Africa, the need to overcome sub-national divisions of a regional, religious or ethnic character has been the one principal justification of such adaptations. The question of national development has provided another.

Occasional valiant attempts are made to argue that democracy is good for economic development. In doing so, however, the criteria of democracy have tended to become modest indeed. As a case for liberal democracy it turns out rather poorly and is more likely to be turned into its opposite. Anyang' Nyong'o argues that it is the lack of democracy that holds back African development:

At the center of the failure of African states to chart viable paths for development (or industrialization) is the issue of lack of accountability, hence of democracy as well (Anyang' Nyong'o 1988a: 72).

It is a developmental version of the classical 'no taxation without representation'. He rejects Huntington's non-democratic case for order and stability. Development, Anyang' argues, needs a strong and resourceful state capable of funding necessary public investment. It must be able to tax the people, but this is not possible if the latter are not convinced that 'their meager resources are properly used by the state.' It requires a 'culture of participation and accountability'. Democracy is therefore crucial for the surplus generating and developmental capacity of the state. Moreover, the lack of democracy, rather than being a source of political stability as suggested by Huntington and others, breeds instability and coups d'état.

As a normative political position this sounds impeccable. As an empirical case for democracy, however, it is rather shaky. 'More participatory political systems', Anyang' suggests, have done much better in terms of economic growth than the less participatory ones. He uses Kenya and the Ivory Coast (later adding Malawi) as cases of the former and Sudan and Zaire as cases of the latter (1988a:77). This has rendered him some bashing from concerned democrats as well from those worried by the logic of such correlations (Mkandawire 1988; Gutto 1989). In response to his critics, he reasserts that in these countries (Kenya, Ivory Coast, Malawi) 'there have been more accountability of the state to its social base — **however narrow** — when compared to the other military dictatorships and no-party regimes'.

There is therefore a prima facie case, in the context of Africa of the post-independence period, to argue that where there has been more respect for democratic practices (**however minimal**) higher rates of growth and more successful models of accumulation have ensued (Anyang' Nyong'o 1988b). [emphasis added]

In a sharp rebuttal, Shadrack Gutto (1989), argues that the notion of democracy looses its meaning if reduced to 'accountability' in such a narrow sense. He recalls the record of political repression in Kenya, from where he himself has been hounded into exile. Thandika Mkandawire (1988), takes up the case of Malawi which, he suggests, is 'typical of a number of cases in which high rates of accumulation have taken place under extremely repressive regimes'. The correlations suggested by Anyang' are not only statistically dubious, according to Mkandawire, but also politically dangerous as they can easily be turned around and used in defence of authoritarianism.

No Proper Bourgeoisie — No Proper Liberal Democracy

Liberals and radicals alike see the low level of material development and strong internal divisions of African societies, ethnic, religious or regional, as major obstacles to democratisation. Both emphasise the absence or distorted nature of the classes, the bourgeoisie, the 'middle class', and the organised working class who are expected, each on their own or in combination, to provide greater social cohesion and sustain the move towards democracy. In particular, it is the absence of a proper bourgeoisie or a 'proper' capitalist society that rules out liberal democracy as a real option.

In the liberal argument, the role of the state as the primary vehicle of dominant class formation has stunted the growth of an indigenous, productive bourgeoisie.

It has also meant the absence of that class that pressed for the expansion of democratic rights and limitation of state power during the early development of democracy in the industrialized West (Diamond 1988:22).

From the radical national perspective, imperialist domination, rather than the 'swollen state' is the primary cause of the distortion of domestic class formation (cf. Beckman 1988c). At one level liberal and radical arguments converge, not least in their emphasis on the 'autonomy of civil society' (Samir Amin 1987), in elaborating the thesis of unequal development, argues that democracy presupposes a civil society with economic relations that are autonomous vis-à-vis the political (1987:2). Its absence 'renders any talk of democracy meaningless'. Democracy is impossible in peripheral capitalist societies where such civil society is feeble or non-existent. Economic life lacks autonomy in relation to state power and to the demands of accumulation at the centre. He draws support from Mahmood Mamdani's (1986,1987) discussion of problems of democracy in peasant societies (Amin 1987:2-3). The state, while appearing strong, is in fact weak which is an additional reason why 'access to true bourgeois democratisation is practically closed' (ibid:5).

Liberals show an equal but different kind of concern with the lack of autonomy of civil society (Hyden 1988; Diamond 1988). They see the release of market forces and the rolling back of the state as a precondition for both a flourishing civil society and for democracy in some distant future. For Samir Amin such a strategy of liberalisation merely reinforces the process of unequal development. It is incapable of producing a basis for bourgeois democracy. The latter, limited as it is, is possible only in the central capitalist countries. Here democracy can be prevented from developing its potentialities by a 'majority consensus', which is possible because these countries are able to exploit their dominant central positions in the world capitalist system (Amin 1987:10).

Liberals and radical 'de-linkers' agree that the absence of a proper bourgeoisie makes liberal democracy impossible. They differ in their political conclusions. The former are reinforced in their commitment to encourage the growth of a 'more authentic and autonomous bourgeoisie' (Diamond 1988:26) in order to open up the road to liberal democracy. For the latter, such a road is closed. The prospects of democracy are premised instead on the struggle for a 'popular national state' capable of de-linking from the processes of unequal development. In both cases, the democratic issue is coupled to a strategy for economic development. For the liberals the agents of democracy and economic development are the same. For the radicals, the de-linking state must be both strong and democratic in order to resist the pressures from the world system (Amin 1987:1).

Liberal Democracy and Neo-Colonialism

The radical case against liberal democracy is reinforced by the way the propagation of democracy is married to foreign economic and political penetration. The current transnational neo-liberal economic offensive to open up Africa for the 'market forces' seeks to claim in the face of strong popular opposition, that Africa is being prepared for democracy. A recent study funded by the US Congress-sponsored National Endowment for Democracy, argues that 'statism must be rolled back' if democracy is to have a chance:

In fact, the increasing movement away from statist economic policies and structures is among the most significant boosts to the democratic prospect in Africa (Diamond 1988:27).

This is hardly convincing to those who see how World Bank and IMF sponsored 'structural adjustment' programmes go hand in hand with intensified state repression against popular and democratic organisations (Bangura and Beckman 1989).

The promotion of capitalism and democracy are posited as being inseparable in this neo-liberal view because democracy requires support for 'a more authentic and autonomous bourgeoisie'. While 'the future of democracy in Africa lies primarily in the hands of the African themselves' (sic!), external assistance can help in fostering 'economic and social pluralism', including the funding of 'struggling publications' that can 'embellish the generally limited pluralism of the African press' (Diamond 1988: 26,29).

Whose 'civil society' and whose 'enabling environment' are we talking about? African left forces can safely guess whose 'struggling publications' are likely to benefit from such support. Much of the fresh interest in 'the laying of the foundations of democracy in civil society' stands out as yet another spell of foreign political intervention on the side of transnational capital and domestic ruling classes. The history of imperialist intervention under the ideological banner of democracy is intimidating. While noting that the general prospects for democracy are bleak, Huntington (1984) suggests that democratic institutions may emerge in some small countries as a result of massive foreign effort, as in the cases of the Dominican Republic and Grenada. In his view, the extension of democracy into the non-Western world has been largely 'the product of Anglo-American efforts'. Nobody should be surprised if some African radical democrats see the new Western concern for democracy as the latest stage of neo-colonialism.

Beyond Liberal Democracy: The Radical Alternatives

Mkandawire argues against an instrumentalist view where the case for democracy is staked on its usefulness for surplus extraction, stability or any other developmental cause: Democracy should be on the agenda, not because of its instrumental, developmental impact, but because it is the recognition of the legitimate rights of the African people to democratically map the destinies of their countries ... (Mkandawire 1988). No democrat would disagree, nor does Anyang' Nyong'o (1988b) in his own rejoinder. But the question remains, of course, what democracy? Although using 'minimal' criteria for the purpose of his criticised correlations, Anyang' himself certainly looks for something more than 'bourgeois' democracy. What are the popular democratic alternatives? The approaches of the left take their point of departure in the questions of national and class emancipation. Samir Amin summarises the 'essential lesson' of the failure in development of independent Africa:

the impossibility of achieving anything significant economically in the absence of a popular national state that is one that is both strong (to resist the negative pressures coming from the world system and their internal ramifications) and democratic (Amin 1987:1).

Such a state, says Anyang' Nyong'o (1987:24) must be 'a state controlled by the popular forces and accountable to them' if it is to be able to plan for 'inward-looking, self-centered and self-sufficient development'. Such a state can only be a result of a 'popular democratic revolution'.

For Mahmood Mamdani the primary task of popular struggles for genuine democracy is to break the political hold of the bourgeoisie over the peasantry by combatting 'the regime of extra-economic coercion':

This is nothing short of a demand for a transformation in production relations. Furthermore, no such changes can be effected without the democratisation of local as well as central state organs (Mamdani 1987:93).

Real democratisation, he suggests, must be from below to prevent popular organisations from being hemmed in by the factional struggles of the bourgeoisie. Unless the autonomy of popular forces can be developed, democracy will remain a sham (ibid:94).

Capturing State Power

How will this be achieved? How will Samir Amin's 'popular national state' be brought about? What is Anyang' Nyong'o's 'popular democratic revolution', and how to get there? Anyang's answer is both militant and cautious. On the one hand, he invokes Lenin, arguing that revolutionary forces cannot just lay hold on the state and use it for their own ends. The first task is therefore to smash the inherited state machinery, including the apparatuses of repression. He warns, on the other hand, against the 'impatience of left forces to get into positions of political power, rather than first build social power among the people': At the root of the strategic political mistake that the left has been making in joining military regimes is the conception of 'state power' as something that can be changed and be put to progressive use once "left personnel" occupy key positions in the state apparatus (Anyang' Nyong'o 1987:23).

A popular democratic revolution, according to Anyang', must be able to 'smash neo-colonial state power'. But he warns against excessive belief in the virtue of armed struggle as a means of achieving it. While accepting Anyang's cautionary remarks, Shadrack Gutto develops the case for armed struggle, not as an end in itself, but as a complement to other forms of popular struggles for democracy when the state, as in the Kenyan case, refuses 'to dismantle an undemocratic social system' (Gutto 1989). It would be defeatist to rule out armed struggle and to exaggerate the military and political strength of the dictators:

The neo-colonial state that is apparently "armed to the teeth" is in fact a very weak state with a very weak army. A state that is alienated from the people ... is in fact very weak when confronted by a popular well organised political and military offensive based among the people (Gutto 1989).

Gutto invokes other third world revolutionary experiences including Cuba, Vietnam and Nicaragua in support of his position. In view of their enormous costs in human and material terms, one wonders how supportive such revolutionary precedents may be of his case. How weak is the enemy really?

Anyang' does not reject armed struggle but emphasises its political base and content. The ambivalence of his position, however, stands out in his comments on the armed struggles in the Sudan and Uganda. On the one hand, he sees them as reflecting the aspirations of 'popular democratic revolutions' and are examples of 'people's struggles for a second independence'. On the other hand, he is anxious to warn against these struggles being derailed, for instance, by 'all kinds of unholy alliances in order to form a government'.

The ultimate test of their success, he says, is the extent to which they will 'smash the neo-colonial state and erect a popular democratic state instead' (ibid:24). It is not clear why Anyang' feels that these specific struggles have such revolutionary democratic potential in the first place, especially in view of his own concern to caution the left against military solutions. The reader cannot help wondering what 'minimal' criteria for considering the neo-colonial state being smashed he may have in mind. What is the popular democratic content of the new popular democratic state?

Popular Democratic Struggles

Radical democrats agree on the centrality of popular movements and popular democratic struggles from below (cf. Mamdani, Mkandawire & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1988). Anyang' expects 'popular rebellion' to take many forms, including alliances of students, trade unions, churches, burial societies, etc. 'Attention to these popular movements is critical in trying to understand the struggle for democracy in Africa'. The popular democratic content, he suggests, springs from the very fact that these movements come from below, so 'their goals and demands must necessarily spell the content of democracy from the point of view of the popular masses' (Anyang' Nyong'o 1988a:81).

How are such alliances of popular movements to be translated into democratic state power? 'Simply to hope that a coalition of these groups is capable of seizing political power and establishing genuine popular democracies is ridiculous', says Gutto (1989), who emphasises the need to be armed with revolutionary ideas and to be properly organised politically.

Mamdani is less directly preoccupied with the capturing of state power and the smashing of the neo-colonial state. His emphasis is on the need to build the autonomy of popular forces, thereby weakening bourgeois class rule. It suggests a gradual shift in the balance of forces rather than an abrupt change from one type of rule to another. His immediate concern is with reforming local state organs that are most directly confronted by the peasantry. He speaks of thorough-going reforms at this level as a minimum for clearing the way for further democratisation. It is part of the effort to break the political hold of the bourgeoisie over the peasantry. Without it no popular force, not even the working class, can hope to influence meaningfully the direction of political events (Mamdani 1987:94). Liberal democratic rights (multiparty system, free elections) offers no solution, according to Mamdani, because they are not relevant to the mass of the population as long as the latter are not free from extra-economic coercion in the process of production.

Who is going to 'break the hold of the bourgeoisie over the peasantry'? Who will 'reform local government, local judiciary and local land allocation/control bodies'? Who is to bring about 'an end to the regime of extra-economic coercion that stifles the peasantry'? In the Nigerian context, I have argued that the most impoverished and oppressed mass strata of the peasantry are unlikely to emerge as a major popular democratic force because of their integration in a subordinate position into commercial-cum-political client relations that tie them to rich peasants, traders, and state officials (Beckman 1988a). How can the political domination and economic exploitation to which they are exposed within these relations be effectively challenged? How can the popular movements, political organisations and other agents of purposeful transformation develop, survive and maximise their impact?

In most of Africa, popular democratic forces can not be expected to fight their struggles from the vantage point of the control of state power. The state has to be fought from organised bases in society. The building of autonomous organisations is critical for whatever inroads popular forces may make into the administration of state power. It is in such a context of ensuring the survival of such organisations and the alliances required that the struggle for liberal democratic rights has acquired a new significance for a growing section of the African left.

Marxists and the Defence of Liberal Democracy

Marxists, according to Sandbrook (1988:249), reject liberal democracy because "it is only a mask for bourgeois domination". To support the point he refers to Jibrin Ibrahim's account in *ROAPE* (1987) of a meeting of the Nigerian Political Science Association where this supposedly was the left view. 'The left united with the right,' according to Sandbrook, 'to defeat a motion to recommend a return to liberal democracy.' He has improved the story. Ibrahim speaks of 'a sizable number' of right wing and left wing protagonists converging on this issue (Ibrahim 1987:38). More importantly, however, Sandbrook jumps to unwarranted conclusions. It was not the Marxist left that opposed liberal democracy. On the contrary, the Marxists were the most consistent in defence of it, including Ibrahim himself, as evidenced by his article which was presented as a paper to the conference.

Significantly, Gutto, the most militant revolutionary taking part in the debates precipitated by Anyang's democracy paper, is also the most explicit defender of

'free and fair elections' in that debate. It is a 'popular pastime of radical populist propaganda', says Gutto, to discuss free and fair elections as a 'mere bourgeois trick':

Free and fair elections are very important and must be pursued resolutely as part and parcel of the overall struggle for political rights. There is nothing bourgeois about free and fair elections. In fact the bourgeoisie fear free and fair elections ... in Africa in particular (Gutto 1989).

Ibrahim agrees: The bourgeoisie is always ready to destroy democratic rights whenever it feels its class interests are threatened. The defence of these rights therefore rests primarily on the working class and other democratic forces. The struggle for liberal democracy is important, he says, because 'it allows the oppressed classes to put the question of alternative ideologies on the agenda'. It gives them the chance to campaign for and contest these ideologies. The material base for fully utilising such liberal democratic rights may be weak but they still help to 'extend and widen the arena of struggle' (Ibrahim 1987:41).

Radical democrats defend liberal democracy first of all for defensive reasons. The material basis of liberal democracy as a system of government in contemporary Africa continues to be weak. The banner of liberal democracy, however, provides a platform for advancing political rights needed in the defence of popular and democratic forces against repression. The popular forces need all the legal, constitutional and ideological protection that they can muster. For this purpose, radical democrats, despite their critique of Africa's liberal democratic experience, enter into alliances with other forces that look to liberal democratic constitutionalism either as a way of boosting their autonomy vis-à-vis the state or as a means to bring about a change of political regime.

The development of the position of the Sudanese Communist Party is instructive on this point; it gradually abandoned the 'hegemonic' political claims that seemed incompatible with broader alliances (Turok 1987:151ff; Mahmoud 1988). In the case of Ghana, a similar process can be seen, albeit in a more fragmented fashion. Despite their contempt for bourgeois party politics as 'perpetual musical chairs in which different bourgeois factions jostle for the right to mismanage the country and plunder its wealth' (Atim 1989), revolutionary groups reach out for alliances with some such factions in order to fight military dictatorship. 'Now the main demand of our struggle', says Nyeya Yen at a United Revolutionary Front function, 'is for pluralism, through which different political groupings could exist without one group legislating against the existence of the others' (*Revolutionary Banner*, 11, 1989).

Conclusions: Expanding the Democratic Space

Returning to the Nigerian scenario for the transition to civilian rule outlined at the outset, the decision by the military government in October 1989 to force its own two-party model on the nation has further undercut the liberal democratic option. The defunct attempt to form a Nigerian Labour Party, however, offers important lessons (Olukoshi 1989). Superficially, it seems as if those who would not have anything to do with 'bourgeois' electoral politics were proven right as the whole process was hijacked by the state. But the defence of democratic rights, says Olukoshi, cannot be reduced to question of electoral politics alone. He recalls the position of those Marxist groups who argued that the Nigerian workers, rather

than putting the labour movement at risk electorally, should join forces with other social groups in a broad alliance to defend the freedom of speech and association, oppose all repressive and obnoxious decrees, campaign for the release of political prisoners, ensure adherence to the rule of law and oppose the militarisation of society (Olukoshi 1989:19).

Radical democrats in Africa do not believe that the promotion of liberal democracy will bring about 'meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force' (Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1988:xvi). Nor do they expect the leaders of the parliamentary game to be recruited on the basis of a 'highly inclusive level of political participation'. For the vast majority of the population the electoral process will offer no meaningful participation in the affairs of the nation. Nor is there much belief in the 'integrity of political competition' or that popular power will come through the ballot box alone. Self-seeking and unpatriotic bourgeois politicians will continue to be the immediate beneficiaries of elections and the rules of the game will remain heavily tilted against popular democratic movements. The latter will continue to face repression, frustration and manipulation.

For a growing section of the African left, however, the struggle for liberal democratic rights has become an important platform for fighting repression and for widening the democratic space within which popular and democratic organisations can survive and develop. It is a defensive strategy but no fine line can be drawn between defence and advance. The democratic space has to be protected in order to be expanded, also to provide the bases from which further advances can be made; an equivalent of the 'liberated areas' of the anti-colonial struggles.

Bibliographic Note

An earlier version of this essay was presented to the ROAPE Conference, "Taking Democracy Seriously: Socialists and Democracy in Africa", University of Warwick, Coventry, 22-24 September, 1989, and to AKUT Conference, "When Does Democracy Make Sense? Political Economy and Political Rights in the Third World", Uppsala University, 26-28 October, 1989. I owe the concept of "democratic space" to the discussions on the latter occasion. I am grateful to Olle Törnquist for detailed comments. The essay is part of a wider argument on state, class and democracy in a book contracted by Zed Books.

Sources cited in the text: Akut 1986, "Labour and Democracy: Economic Transformation and Popular Struggles". AKUT 35. Uppsala: AKUT (Working Group for the Study of Development Strategies). Amin, S. 1987, "The State and the Question of Development". Preface to Anyang' Nyong'o (ed) 1987. Anyang' Nyong'o, P. (ed) 1987, *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*. London and New Jersey: Zed and UNU. —1988a, "Political Instability and the Prospects for Democracy in Africa". *Africa Development* 13:1. —1988b, "Democracy and Political Instability: A Rejoinder to the Comments by Dr. Thandika Mkandawire". *Africa Development* 13:3. ASUU 1986, Academic Staff Union of the Universities, Communique from National Conference on the Political Debate, Kano, March, 27-28. Signed by Mahmud M. Tukur and G.G. Darah. Atim, C.B. 1989, "Students, workers and democracy in Ghana (1974-88)". Paper for the AKUT Conference "When Does Democracy Make Sense". Uppsala: AKUT. Bako, Sabo 1986, "Nigerian Left-Wing Politics in the 1990: Some Lessons from the P.R.P." Paper to the Nigerian Political Science Association Conference on "Alternative Futures for Nigeria", May 21-25, Lagos. Bangura, Y. and B. Beckman 1989, *African Workers and Structural Adjustment*. Paper to UNRISD Conference on Economic Crisis and Third World Countries, Kingston. April. Beckman, B. 1986 "The military as revolutionary vanguard: a critique". *Review of African Political*

Economy 37. —1988a "Peasants and democratic struggles in Nigeria". *Review of African Political Economy* 41. —1988b *State, class and democracy: Nigeria, 1975-1992*. Research Proposal to SAREC. —1988c "The post-colonial state: Crisis and reconstruction". *IDS Bulletin* 19:4. Also in Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies, African Futures: 25th Anniversary Conference. —1988d "Comments on Göran Hydén's State and Nation under Stress". In Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Recovery in Africa: A challenge for Development Cooperation in the 90s*. Stockholm: The Ministry. —1988f *When does democracy make sense? Problems of theory and method in the study of democratisation in Africa and the Third World*. Paper to AKUT Conference, Uppsala, October. Chabal, P. (ed) 1986a, Political Domination in Africa. Reflections on the Limits of Power. Cambridge: UP. —1986b, "Introduction: Thinking about politics in Africa". In Chabal 1986a. Diamond, L., Linz, J.J., Lipset, S.M. (eds) 1988, *Democracy in Developing Countries*. Volume Two: Africa. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. Diamond, L. 1988, "Introduction: Roots of Failure, Seeds of Hope". In Diamond, Linz and Lipset (eds) 1988. Gutto, S.B.O. 1989, "Social Revolutions — The Preconditions for Sustainable Development and People's Democracies in Africa: A Contribution to the Anyang' Nyong'o/Mkandawire Debate". *Africa Development*, forthcoming. Hansen, E. 1987, "The State and Popular Struggles in Ghana, 1982-86". In Anyang' Nyong'o (ed) 1987. Himmelstrand, U. 1988, "Kenya behövs i apartheidkampen" (Kenya is needed in the struggle against apartheid), *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm), 7 Nov. —1989, "Mamdani versus Hydén — Analysis of a Debate". Working Paper for the Project "In Search of New Paradigms for the Study of African Development". Nairobi. Huntington, S.P. 1984, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly*, 99:2. —1968, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale UP. Hydén, G. 1988, "State and Nation under Stress". In *Recovery in Africa*. Stockholm: Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ibrahim, J. 1987, "The Political Debate and the Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria". *Review of African Political Economy*, 37. Also in Oculi 1987. —1989, "The state, accumulation and democratic forces in Nigeria". Paper to the AKUT Conference "When Does Democracy Make Sense?" Uppsala. Mahmoud, F.B. (ed) 1988, *Calamity in Sudan: Civilian Versus Military Rule*. London: Institute for African Alternatives. Mamdani, M. 1986, "The Agrarian Question and the Democratic Struggle". *Bulletin of the Third World Forum*, 6. —1987, "Contradictory Class Perspectives on the Question of Democracy: The Case of Uganda". In Anyang' Nyong'o (ed) 1987. (This is a slightly revised and expanded version of "Peasant and Democracy in Africa", *New Left Review* 156, 1986.) Mamdani, M., T. Mkandawire, Wamba-Dia-Wamba, 1988, "Social Movements, Social Transformation and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa". Working Paper 1/88. Dakar: Codesria. Mkandawire, T. 1988, "Comments on Democracy and Political Instability". *Africa Development* 13:3. Oculi, O. (ed) 1987, *Nigerian Alternatives*. Zaria: Department of Political Science, A.B.U. Olukoshi, A.O. 1989, "Nigerian Marxist Responses to the Formation of the Nigerian Labour Party (NLP)". Paper to Conference on "Philosophy, Ideology and Society in Africa", Vienna. Revolutionary Banner 1989, *Organ of the United Revolutionary Front, Ghana*. London: URF. Sandbrook, R. 1985, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*. Cambridge: CUP. —1988, "Liberal Democracy in Africa: A Socialist-Revisionist Perspective". *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. 22:2. —1989, "Economic Crisis, Structural-Adjustment and the State in Sub-Saharan Africa". Paper to Conference on Economic Crisis and Third World Countries: Impact and Response, Kingston, Jamaica, April. Geneva: UNRISD. Sklar, R.L. 1983, "Democracy in Africa". *African Studies Review*, 26:3-4. As reprinted in Chabal 1986a. Turok, B. 1987, *Africa: What Can Be Done?* London and New Jersey: Institute for African Alternatives and Zed Books.

* * *