

III. There is no democracy in Uganda

The Ugandan Parliament, on July 10, 1997, voted up the National Resistance Movement bill, put forward by Minister of State for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, E. Kirenga, thereby making Uganda officially a one-party state.

The bill states that every Ugandan citizen is automatically a member of Museveni's National Resistance Movement, and it is through this Movement only that a citizen may engage in any political activity. The Parliament voted to block all political parties from the Movement's supreme organ, the National Conference.

The National Resistance Movement is officially the political wing of Museveni's National Resistance Army. The NRM has no structure of its own in the regions and districts of Uganda. "Government structures are also NRM structures at every level," stated Cecilia Ogwal, of the Ugandan Peoples Congress, in her 1995 document "Dictatorship and Donor Policy." The NRM "has a national headquarters, but no offices or branches anywhere else. The headquarters staff are all paid from public funds. The assets or property of the NRM have all been acquired and paid for from public funds. The staff at the headquarters are appointed or removed by the NRM chairman, Lt. General Museveni, who is also the chairman of the NRA [now the Ugandan Popular Defense Forces]. It is clear that the structure of the NRM being indivisible from the structure of the dictatorship, the NRM can only relinquish its privileges and advantages in the politics and governance of Uganda when the dictatorship itself ceases to be a fact of life."

U.S. ambassador challenges the game

The consolidation of the rule of the National Resistance Movement over Uganda has been directly challenged by U.S. Ambassador to Uganda Michael Southwick. Southwick, who leaves his post in August, told the *New Vision* newspaper on July 20 that the passage of the NRM bill would "just keep Uganda in the problems of the past indefinitely, as it seeks to 'consolidate power in the hands of one group indefinitely' " at the expense of those who have refused to join the Movement. "We see serious problems with the bill," Southwick said, "and also with the draft of the parties bill," which seeks to regulate all activities of any political parties. "This stems from a fundamental problem in Article 269 of the Constitution, which suppressed the fundamental freedoms of association and assembly."

Although the Constitution permits political parties to exist, Article 269 of the Constitution effectively bans all their normal activities, stipulating that political parties are prohibited from:

- "opening and operating branch offices;
- "holding delegates' conferences;
- "sponsoring or offering a platform to or in any way campaigning for or against a candidate for any public elections;
- "carrying out any activities that may interfere with the movement political system for the time being in force."

Museveni has initiated two new ploys to consolidate the police-state he has clamped on Uganda. First, is the "Political Parties Bill," which seeks to codify the prohibitions of Article 269, even to the point of stipulating that "every political party intending to hold a public meeting in any area of Uganda shall notify the senior police officer in charge of that area not later than 48 hours before the day of the holding of the meeting. The organisers of the meeting shall give the police officer such information relating to the meeting as he or she may reasonably require." Such stipulations could be expected to put a sub-zero "chill" on the rights of free assembly and association.

Second, Museveni is calling for a referendum to determine whether political parties should exist at all. However, given the enormous constraints already imposed on their activity, the political parties would be effectively banned from organizing in their own defense!

This referendum has come under direct criticism from Southwick as well. "You don't have a referendum on religious and press freedom," he told *New Vision*, "so why have it on freedom of association and assembly. These are not votable commodities." The American ambassador, reported *New Vision*, noted that the United States would not be contributing any funding to carry out the referendum, and then went to the core of the issue, "warning that if the possibility of political competition becomes remote, the system will become distanced from the people, authoritarian and corrupt."

Southwick's warning is echoed more bluntly in the opposition. In the parliamentary debate on the NRM bill, opposition MP Okullo Epak declared that the proposed legislation "demonstrates yet another determination of the

Movement to impose themselves on the people of Uganda. It is a state-level thuggery by which the people of Uganda are held at ransom by a corrupt group who call themselves strugglists.”

On the ground, the one-party system means that anyone challenging the Museveni regime politically is largely defenseless against the thug tactics used by Museveni’s military rule, to suppress opposition. The cases of this suppression are many. For instance, even during the 1996 election campaign when all the world’s eyes were watching, Museveni’s troops stormed an 800-person rally called to hear Paul Ssemogerere, who was running for President with the backing of his own Democratic Party, as well as the Ugandan Peoples Congress, as a “unity candidate” against Museveni. Charles Atwoki Kagenda’s interview, which immediately follows, vividly describes how the suppression of political parties worked in practice during the election campaign. As Southwick said in his *New Vision* interview, “Nobody should deceive themselves that these elections were free and fair in the sense that they met international norms.”

Harassment of journalists, including periodic arrest, is also a common feature of Uganda’s political life. In the month of June, two leaders of the opposition parties were murdered. Ugandan Peoples Congress local leader Samson

Kasajja was gunned down by unknown assailants; and Democratic Party regional leader Modesta Kabaranga was burned to death in her home, when unknown people poured paraffin on her and set her ablaze.

Museveni’s anti-democracy myths

Museveni claims that such liberal ideas as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association would only lead to chaos in Uganda, because there is no “middle class” prepared to take advantage of such freedoms. Further, Museveni and his cohorts have always maintained that if the military rule of his National Resistance Movement is lifted, the political parties will hurl Uganda into a pit of ethnic strife.

The two major parties are the Democratic Party and the Ugandan Peoples Congress, which have had a history of bitter political war against each other. However, it was not the parties that threw Uganda into periods of violence, said one Ugandan analyst, but the political leaders who stepped out of bounds of the parties to invoke the powers of the military to settle the internal political debates through violence.

Furthermore, it is the periods of total dictatorship in Uganda—not the periods of political party rule—that have seen the most wanton bloodshed in the country. Idi Amin declared war on the northern Acholi and Langi groups, especially within the military itself. Museveni’s bloody record of civil wars is documented in the next section of this report.

The wars and the rule of the military—rather than the rule of law—go hand in hand in Uganda. The wars cannot be carried out without military rule; the military cannot rule unless it has internal wars to justify and perpetuate its rule. As an editorial in the Ugandan daily *Monitor* angrily denounced the National Resistance Movement bill: “Museveni’s insistence on a one-party state against which hundreds of thousands of Ugandans shed blood and sacrificed their all is but an indication that those who died during his five-year guerrilla war in the forests of Luwero died in vain. . . . As to how much blood must flow before we see an end to these rudimentary, suppressive, and unaccommodative political systems, only time can tell.”

In this light, it is a testimony to the effectiveness of London’s international propaganda campaign on behalf of the Museveni myth that Col. Kahinda Otafire, then minister of state in the President’s Office, can be quoted by the London *Financial Times* on July 20, 1995, as saying: “The political system we have adopted has made Uganda better than it was. It is not an act of God that we have had calm and peace in the country over the last 10 years. It is not a perfect system, but it is working.”

Colonel Otafire is currently posted to Gulu, in northern Uganda, where he is in charge of the “Northern Pacification Program.”

DO YOU KNOW

- that the American Revolution was fought ~~against~~ British “free trade” economics?
- that Washington and Franklin championed Big Government?
- that the Founding Fathers promoted partnership between private industry and central government?

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