

Nigeria: Boko Haram's Christmas Day bombings

Working people must unite against descent into anarchy
General strike to reinstate government fuel subsidy

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The 25 December Christmas Day bomb explosions by the Islamist Boko Haram sect wreaked havoc in three states across Nigeria. Scores of people were torn apart and many more injured as they prepared to go home after church services.

Among the more audacious previous attacks of Boko Haram were the bombings of the National Police headquarters and the United Nations office in the capital, Abuja. The demands of the group, which became publicly known in 2009, include the establishment of Sharia law, prosecution of those responsible for the extra-judicial killings of their leaders in 2009 and the release of their detained members.

While giving no support to so-called security forces' illegal actions, the DSM totally condemns the Boko Haram policy of deliberately attacking ordinary citizens - a policy which is clearly aimed at provoking and deepening religious and ethnic divisions among the population.

The terroristic methods of the Boko Haram sect only inflicts more pain and untold hardship on the oppressed working masses who are already suffering from the anti-poor and neoliberal policies of the corrupt capitalist ruling elite. Insecurity has now been added to economic hardship and poverty.

Rather than effecting real change, acts of individual terrorism allow the anti-poor government to justify outrageous spending on police and repression, under the guise of fighting terrorism. The whopping N900 billion (\$5.5 billion) that president Goodluck Jonathan proposes to spend on security in the 2012 budget, can only be for the twin purpose of attacking the masses and safeguarding his government's existence.

When faced with mass revolt, the government will use the same weapons to crush the legitimate protests of workers, students and the youth - including strikes and mass protests that may break out in response to removing the fuel subsidy and other anti-poor policies.

As far as the Nigerian ruling elite is concerned, the prospect of powerful

movements of workers, the poor and youth challenging the government's anti-poor policies is more dangerous to their corrupt and unjust capitalist system than Boko Haram.

It should be recalled that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC - Nigeria's main trade union centre) nearly called off last September's protest in Abuja against the anti-poor privatisation programme on the basis of the security situation.

In order to frustrate that planned action the government had issued "security intelligence" that the mass protest could be infiltrated by Boko Haram terrorists.

Workers' defence

Already there is creeping militarisation of society as more and more soldiers are drafted to the streets to maintain internal security, as we now have in Jos and Maiduguri.

Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the government will turn the full weight of military and police infrastructures on the working class, youth and the poor fighting against neoliberal policies and for change. This will also include rolling back democratic rights won over decades through struggle, including the rights to unionise, protest and strike.

The Boko Haram menace, just like other ethno-religious violence in Nigeria, is inseparable from the unresolved national question flowing from the country's colonial past, as well as the unjust capitalist socio-economic arrangement which ensures that 1% of the population steals 95% of the oil wealth while over 80% live below the poverty line.

It is against this background that the Boko Haram menace, as well as the increasing and vicious spate of armed robberies and kidnappings, has continued to defy all measures advanced by the government, police and security experts to curb it.

The scourge of Boko Haram is not going to stop even with the N900 billion security budget unless the underlying socio-economic issues are resolved.

Well before Boko Haram appeared on the scene it was 'normal' for the rival gangs and factions of the ruling elite to provoke sectarian conflicts, assassinations and violent vote rigging in order to get their bloody hands on the country's wealth. We cannot expect the looters running the country to act in the interests of the majority.

Against this background, for the labour movement to call on a government that has lost control to "improve security" is a joke. Instead, labour needs to call on the working class and poor people to begin to form mass defence committees in workplaces, communities and the streets under the democratic control of the trade unions and pro-masses' organisations.

Such committees, involving the working class and youth and cutting across all ethnic or religious divides, will have the duty to patrol and maintain security both day and night.

The democratic mass defence committees we advocate will not be like the state security agencies which are ultimately organs of repression of the corrupt ruling class.

The democratic mass defence committees we advocate are a peoples' army composed of militant working class people and youth of all tribes and ethnic groups, united by being members of the oppressed class, and whose duties will be total-

ly subjected to democratic debates in popular assemblies and other mass decision making bodies.

The NLC and the Trades Union Congress need to immediately call a 48-hour warning general strike and mass protest as the next step in fighting against the proposed removal of the fuel subsidy. Such a struggle against all anti-poor policies can begin to offer a way out for impoverished and frustrated youth, poor people and the working class.

Change

The labour movement needs to act as a social force that can lead Nigerians out of the mess and chaos created by the ruling elite. It should convene an independent Sovereign National Conference and build a mass workers' party that can take political power from the corrupt ruling elite and form a workers' and poor people's government.

Such a government would be able to defuse ethnic and religious tension by running society democratically in the interests of the majority. Nationalising the key sectors of the economy under public democratic management would allow massive investment in education, health, public infrastructure, job creation, etc, unlike the present unjust capitalist system which runs society in the interest of a rich few.

Stop press

●Since the above article was written president Goodluck Jonathan has declared an indefinite 'state of emergency' in those areas hit by bombings. The threat to democratic rights was heightened when Andrew Azazi, the national security adviser, said: "The security forces will have more powers in those areas to arrest suspects, to make searches, without necessarily getting all the evidence."

Also, on 1 January, a Nigerian government regulatory agency announced the withdrawal of fuel subsidies provoking widespread public protests, including a trade union demonstration in Lagos.

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The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

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