



Posted by Kola Odetola on July 3, 2005, 3:03 am

## Corruption isn't the cause of African Underdevelopment

So corruption is the cause of Africa's problems - that seems to be the latest addition to the pool of knowledge currently nourishing the pop fuelled debate on the blighted continent.

An economically nonsensical assertion of course, since private capital, the real engine of growth in a capitalist economy is not deterred from investing in any part of the world if the potential for significant profit extraction exists regardless of the recipient nations penchant for graft. And lets face it, corruption - the theft of public money is a far less grievous crime than stealing - the theft of private money. Once foreign capitalists can be insured by a police state against the latter, they always find a way of living with the former, just another entry in the cost column of the balance sheet.

The theft of money from the third world state, primitive private accumulation, could even help boost an economy, if it is ploughed back into building factories, plants and property, creating jobs and generating wealth. But capitalists only invest in an economy that's growing not one that's stagnating.

In the 60's and 70's, most African economies were growing at rapid rates even though the elite was just as corrupt as it is now. But the economy had not yet been wrecked by the Reagan/Thatcher neo liberal revolution, there was still some scope for indigenous growth and development, before it's rudimentary protection from the direct ravages of imperialism was contemptuously swept aside by the west.

Corruption has worsened in the continent now because the comprador African Bourgeoisie has been denied even the marginal role it once played in the local economy, as light factory owners, middle men and minority share holders in foreign multinationals, a collapse accentuated by the ruin of the middle classes who formed a large part of the local market that sustained its wealth. When a possessing class is prevented from accumulating wealth "legitimately", it doesn't go away, it merely awakens the latent criminality that lurks beneath the refined surface of every patriach of welath, for the best of capitalists are driven by the same force as the worst of bandits - greed.

Whether a ruling class obtains its riches by plundering the state or drug running, piracy and people trafficking as the British capitalists once did, depends on their circumstances not their convictions

If corruption is the root cause of African poverty, then how do we explain the comparatively huge growth figures lot African countries enjoyed in the 60's and 70's when corruption flourished just as much as now.

In Nigeria, after 100 years of colonialism, the "honest" English left just one university, where the department of classical Latin was lavished more attention than the department of Civil Engineering! Within 20 years, the corrupt Nigerian ruling class had built over 25 universities and by 1985 the country had almost 500,000 students in one form of higher education or another.

As for the claim that the monies stolen from Africa could be better spent on health and education, this is a red herring.

African countries can't spend more on social services because the IMF and the World Bank set strict limits on such public expenditure.

I know this, not from reading radical articles but from personal experience. In the early 90's I was a student activist in Nigeria, where year after year we revolted against the military junta's attempts to enforce the world banks demands to close down whole faculties, phase out most public universities, commercialise the remnants

and throw thousands of lecturers from the humanities, Science, Engineering and medicine onto the trash heap.

We were openly told by World Bank reps that there were too many Africans in schools and too few on the farms. To impose their will, schools were regularly shut, hundreds of activists rusticated, arrested, tortured and killed.

Corruption is an economic category, not a moral one. It's a form of parasitism, but parasites flourish best on dead, not live organisms. The African economy has never really been healthy, dominated as it has always been by predatory imperialism, but the west's witch doctors, the IMF and the World Bank long ago consigned their patient from intensive care to the mortuary.

The Maggots were then given free reign.

Finally there is a link between the gangsters who rule Africa and the west who hypocritically condemn them. The most corrupt African leaders also happen to be the ones renown for the most zealous enforcement of pro-western economic reforms.

Babangida, Abacha, Mobutu, Bokassa and Eyadema, the Al Capone's of the African continent, were some of the most diligent pupils of the IMF, killing thousands who protested its horrific measures.

On the other hand, left wing leaders in the continent, hated and demonised by the west, like Nyerere, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Samorah Machel inspite of all their undoubted faults and narrow nationalism died in relative penury.

Corruption is unsightly, so is a boil, but boils don't cause diseases, they manifest them. Neo colonial capitalism is a plague in Africa, corruption is merely one of its symptoms.