

trivial incident, a U.N. plane at the airport was hit on Sept. 6 by snipers' bullets—i.e., no artillery was involved—the U.N. shut down the airport, which remained closed through Sept. 7.

### 'Contact Group' infamy

As mentioned above, the counterpoint to the postponement of the papal visit was the announcement the next day by the Big Five "Contact Group" urging that international economic sanctions against Serbia be lifted. The announcement for the group was made by Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Special Envoy for former Yugoslavia. The key player in the Contact Group, however, is not Russia, but Britain, which, playing on the national profile of France and on the neo-imperial profile, tendencies, and propensities of Russia, has succeeded in forging a "three out of five" majority on the Balkans which determines the parameters of what becomes the consensus for the five as a whole. This consensus is buttressed by the fact that what Lyndon LaRouche has identified as "automatic pilot" policies from the Bush period are still the policies governing the conduct of the United States in this group. With the Americans taking no initiative to break the British-manufactured consensus, Germany, whatever other inclinations it may have, goes along with the Anglo-American dictates.

Based on Russia's historical-ideological "natural" response to support Serbia, Britain has achieved major successes through the Contact Group, which came into being as a Big Power agency to deal with the crisis in former Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Encouraged by this success, Britain has engineered that the Contact Group's role has been expanded far beyond the domain of former Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Behind the scenes, the Contact Group is already involved in crisis management arrangements concerning Haiti, Cuba, and the regions of the former U.S.S.R., including the Caucasus and Ukraine.

Barring a decisive move by the Clinton presidency to put an end to British-steered "consensus" policies, this will be only the beginning. Russian and European sources reveal that the Contact Group could soon turn its attention to the Algeria-centered Maghreb Crisis, and to other potential conflict areas such as India-Pakistan. Policy elites, both in the West and in Russia, are speaking of the Contact Group as the nucleus for an evolving world leadership structure, taking over from the present U.N. Security Council, which in the eyes of Britain and allied oligarchic interests, has proven to be ineffective.

Most important of all for Britain, the maintenance of the Contact Group provides the perfect vehicle by which the British can continue their age-old game of playing some powers off against one another, to the detriment of the other powers. If there is to be any hope for the Balkans or any other region of the world, the British-led forces holding the great nation-states of the world in check, have to be defeated.

## Nigeria wins the first round

by Lydia Cherry

The fact that a two-month-old Nigerian oil strike crumbled under pressure from the oil workers themselves at the end of August, is further indication that the "Project Democracy"-style destabilization attempt that has brought down one government after another in the developing sector doesn't always work, particularly if the targeted government is pursuing sound economic policies. Even the London *Financial Times*, which has consistently editorialized in favor of the demise of the military government of Gen. Sani Abacha, acknowledged on Sept. 6 that the oil workers had become "isolated in their struggle against General Abacha's regime, which has rejected their demands," and that "the virtual collapse of the strike leaves the government in its strongest position in several months."

The wind-down of the strike was expected following Abacha's address to the nation on Aug. 17, in which he explained why he was replacing the leaders of the two unions with administrators. The government could not stand by endlessly and watch this "attempt to destroy the economic lifeline of our nation," he said. He noted that the government had waited this long (six weeks) in hopes that the union leaders themselves would "retrace their steps" and return to acting as patriots, because "no true national patriot would disparage his fatherland with foreign contrivance with the hope of instituting democracy on the debris of his country."

General Abacha reiterated "the unflinching commitment of this administration to an early return to civil democratic rule," noted the complexity of the task in this "nation of over 250 ethnic groups inhabiting the 30 states and a federal capital," and emphasized the need to be alert to outside manipulation.

Some of the strike demands were peculiar. Among them was that the Nigerian government immediately pay the \$800 million in arrears which Nigeria owes the Royal Dutch Shell group and other international companies for joint venture costs. The leaders of the two unions, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (Nupeng) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (Pengassan), were also solid supporters of western darling Moshood Abiola, and the Abiola issue began to be promoted as one of the major union demands. Soon it became clear that the oil strike

had almost nothing to do with workers' "rights," but was a component part of a destabilization operation designed to attempt to fragment Nigeria's military and to put the country back into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) orbit—through the use of the Abiola "card."

### **What democrat?**

"Democrat" Abiola has a history every bit as peculiar as the strike demands. Knowledgeable Nigerians from both pro- and anti-government factions concur that Abiola has been the epitome of corruption. Now a multi-millionaire, Abiola's career began as an accountant for ITT. But in the 1970s, in particular, he functioned as the point man between ITT and various Nigerian governments in deals that involved large sums of Nigerian money. Abiola has claimed publicly that during these years he blackmailed ITT, but he also seems to have carried out amazing deception operations with several Nigerian governments. For example, in the early 1970s, Abiola was the point man for Nigeria investing \$360 million in an Aerostat Balloon Project, an experiment that was to have revolutionized the communications network of Nigeria, but, in fact, was ill-conceived and ended up being a complete failure. Abiola, however, was able to line his pockets with huge amounts of money from the project that wasn't.

Other projects were designed, with Abiola the point man. One ITT project, for which Abiola collected hundreds of millions of dollars in the mid-1970s, was to have provided Nigeria with thousands of phone lines; only 12 years later did the project begin to get off the ground, and only after the technology had been superseded by the introduction of digital communication systems.

Abiola also functioned as piggybank for military coups, including the palace coup that brought General Babangida's pro-IMF regime into existence in the mid-1980s. The government that was brought down through this caper was the anti-IMF, anti-corruption government of General Buhari, who had become head of state in 1983. Both pro- and anti-Abacha Nigerians today describe the Buhari government as the pinnacle of honesty and a time of hope. Buhari had consistently refused to even meet with Abiola, holding him personally responsible for the ITT-related disasters. Reflective of how involved Abiola was with this coup, the coup announcement was broadcast from the Radio Communication Co. of Nigeria (RCN), a company for which Abiola is the chairman and chief executive. Were the coup to have failed, Abiola's private aircraft was on hand to fly Babangida out of the country.

Abiola was then handpicked by Babangida in 1993 to be one of two presidential candidates in an election that Babangida then proceeded to annul for reasons that are still not clear. Some sources insist that Babangida turned on Abiola because of a money deal in which Abiola was to have shared the booty with Babangida, but for some reason did not. (This June 1993 annulled election is one of many contentious issues that Nigerian delegates to the ongoing Constitutional Confer-

ence in Abuja are attempting to resolve.) Abiola is now in a Nigerian jail on a treason charge, following his attempt in June to return to Nigeria and declare himself head of state—a plan that Nigerians based in London say was devised in the U.K. by a group of retired generals and politicians headed by General Babangida's foreign minister, Bolaji Akinyemi.

### **A slap at the IMF**

Eight months ago, following General Abacha's initial announcement of the reversal of the IMF policies of the Babangida years because the country was on the verge of collapse, U.S. and British think-tanks reacted immediately. The World Bank asserted that the Abacha policies of fixing interest and currency exchange rates, imposing controls on foreign exchange trading and imports, and allocating 60% of bank credit to agriculture and manufacturing enterprises would fail. An Aspen Institute specialist on Nigeria warned of potential danger because "anything that happens in Nigeria could have a big spillover in the rest of Africa." The Aspen expert bemoaned that "the Nigerian government is a military government, which means they can do whatever they want."

In discussing with *EIR* why the Abacha government is still standing despite the opposition to it, one Nigerian source noted: "Let's face it, if we didn't have a military government right now, we would already be back under IMF control." At the same time that the Constitutional Conference is attempting to work out the future, decision after decision is being made from the top. At about the same time that rumors began to circulate in the United States and Europe of supposed splits in the Nigerian military, Abacha announced on Aug. 22 the appointment of Brig. Gen. Alwali Kazir as the new head of the Army, and Commodore Mike Akhigbe as the new head of the Navy. Following the replacement of the leaders of the unions, a cabinet reshuffle is now expected. In late August, the government kicked out a CNN television crew, after the duo, Bob Cohen and Amy Merz, both based in Harare, Zimbabwe, refused to follow the itinerary they had agreed to. They had apparently agreed to cover the Constitutional Conference, and to visit the Nigerian states of Kaduna and Kano in the north, Sokoto in the northeast, and another state in the south. Instead, they wanted to be "where the action was," i.e., Lagos, the one city in which the western-spawned Project Democracy apparatus has succeeded in creating economic stagnation.

Both CNN and BBC have given big play to the oil strike and the democracy groups' initiatives. This "news," of course, is played back into other parts of Nigeria. In late August, Nigerians in seven states in the north held a series of protests against CNN and BBC "distortions" in presenting the circus in Lagos as indicative that the country as a whole was at a standstill.

With the crumbling of the strike, "now the conference has a chance of being heard," Reuters quoted a western diplomat in Lagos who has been following the crisis.