

IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION HAS MADE US STRONGER

PIERRE EDON



experiences
and Facts





On October 26, 1972, after nearly a century of colonization and a decade of neocolonization, the people of Benin broke with the old order of exploitation and began to advance toward their true liberation, guided by Marxist-Leninist ideas.

As in so many other cases, this process was slowed by the maneuvers of imperialism, which, in an effort to block a new people's victory, paid, organized and trained a band of mercenaries who landed silently at the Cotonou airport on January 16, 1977, determined to destroy Benin's Revolution.

As in so many other cases, too, the people courageously defended their right to build a better future and gave a severe drubbing to the imperialist mercenaries.

On the third anniversary of that mercenary defeat, Pierre Edon, Commercial Attaché at the Embassy of the People's Republic of Benin in Cuba, gave a press conference at OSPAAAL headquarters briefly reviewing that part of his country's history and reporting on the rapid advance of Benin's Revolution.

The invasion

BEFORE dawn on Sunday, January 16, 1977, a DC-7 turboprop pirate plane¹ landed at Cotonou's international airport with a band of heavily armed mercenaries.

As soon as it touched down, the mercenaries, armed with guns, mortars and rockets, launched an attack designed to destabilize the revolutionary process. Advancing on our Palace of the Revolution, their main target, they caused untold damage, but the People's Armed Forces, backed by the entire population, responded firmly, and we repelled the aggressors, who abandoned most of their sophisticated weapons, many valuable documents and a number of their dead in their precipitate flight.

Many Beninese militants were also killed and several dozen seriously wounded in the cowardly imperialist attack. As soon as the invaders were overcome, the Beninese government set up a National Investigating Commission to counteract imperialism's false reports of the attack. It also formed an International Commission composed of representatives from Guinea, Nigeria and Benin. The Common African, Malagasy and Mauritian Organization (OCAM) sent a delegation headed by Sidney Moutia, its General Secretary, to Cotonou on January 28, 1977, to verify the facts. The World Federation of Trade Unions also sent a delegation, headed by its Vice-President, and the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization sent an Investigating Commission headed by Vice-President Bangoura.

Following its February 7, 1977, Security Council meeting, which approved Resolution 404, the United Nations set up a special three-man investigating commission, headed by Mr. Jorge Illuega, Panama's representative to the United Nations, and also including Mr. Mansur R. Kikhia, representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, and Mr. R. Mulye, representative of India to the United Nations. This commission went to Benin to investigate and verify the facts.

On February 12, 1977, the 28th Ministerial Meeting of the Organization of African Unity also sent an investigating commission, composed of one minister each from Libya, Nigeria, Guinea, the Niger, Mozambique, Angola and Zambia, plus representatives of the OAU Secretariat.

These groups had an opportunity to make firsthand investigations while the imperialists and their allies were trying to

¹ DC-7s usually have turbojet engines. The fact that this one had a turboprop engine may be due to its frequent use in planes designed to fly intermediate-range distances. Militarily, it is restricted to planes used for reconnaissance and submarine detection, because it can fly at low altitude, below the radar screen, and has a low noise level that makes it ideal for infiltration actions such as the one in Benin.

confuse international public opinion by presenting this cowardly imperialist attack as a confrontation between different reactionary forces within the country.

The documents that the mercenaries left behind when they fled, however, prove how the invasion was organized and carried out.

The organizers of the aggression

The number one organizer of the aggression was the Kingdom of Morocco, which placed the military installations of Benguéir — a former US base near Marrakesh — at the disposal of the mercenaries for lodging, training and general preparation. Morocco also provided much of the war matériel, including a DC-8 transport plane that was used to carry troops from Benguéir to Franceville, in Gabon, on January 15, 1977. Moreover, King Hassan II of Morocco underwrote the invasion to the tune of \$530 000.

The second most important organizer of the invasion was Gabon's President Omar Bonge, who provided \$630 000 to finance the attack and collaborated closely with Hassan II by letting the mercenaries land the DC-8 at Franceville's international airport. The government of Gabon also provided the invaders with an unknown quantity of weapons to complement those that King Hassan II had already given them, food, medicine and a DC-7 to transport the mercenary troops from Franceville to Cotonou on January 16, 1977.

Third in importance was Togo, whose President authorized the second company of foreign invaders from Gabon to be stationed in his territory under the deceitful pretext of an imminent invasion of his country from Benin because of the border dispute between the two countries — even though relations between Lomé and Cotonou had been normalized in February 1976.

The chief mission assigned this second company, that operated out of Togo, was to attack the Beninese people and, at the same time, speedily neutralize a part of the People's Armed Forces of Benin.

At a secret meeting held in Gabon on January 2, 1977, Gabonese President Bongo; Togolese President Guassingbe Égadema; and a French Colonel, Gilbert Bourgeaud, who headed the mercenaries, worked out the details for the invasion on the 16th.

The Ivory Coast and Senegal were also compromised in the aggression, which was fully backed by international — mainly French — imperialism.

Beninese counterrevolutionaries, including Dr. Emile Derlin Zinsou, former President of Benin and an agent of the French Service of Documentation and Counterespionage (CDCE) since 1950 and of the CIA since 1964, were used as a cover. Other counterrevolutionaries who played an extremely important role in the attack were Pablo Darboux and, especially, Pognon Gratien, who was to become President of the country if the invasion succeeded.



This individual, Benin's former Ambassador in Brussels and a CDCE agent, was the self-styled head of the so-called Dahomey Liberation Front, a regrouping of counterrevolutionaries under the orders of French imperialism.

The aforementioned Colonel Gilbert Bourgeaud, technical adviser to the Gabonese President and head of the CDCE in Gabon, was in charge of recruiting the mercenaries. He managed to get together 90 of them for the invasion of Benin: 60 Europeans and 30 Africans. The Europeans were recruited from among veterans, who already knew weapons-handling techniques and needed only a short training course at the Benguérir military base to get back in shape. The 30 African mercenaries had less experience in handling weapons and were therefore given an intensive 46-day course at Benguérir.

Three separate budgets were used to finance the aggression: \$450 000 was designated for investigation, \$476 000 for preoper-

ational activities and \$530 000 for postoperational activities. The weapons were provided outside of these budgets, mainly by Gabon, Morocco and France.

The aims of the attack

The invaders were to overthrow the revolutionary regime of Benin by assassinating its current leaders and setting up a government that would follow the orders of French imperialism, which would then send the French Army to occupy the country. To this end, such strategic points as the presidential palace, the Cotonou military camp, the radio station and the homes of various political leaders were to be seized.

It was a plan for colonial reconquest, pure and simple. French imperialism, aware of the growing strength of the revolutionary movement that had emerged in Benin in 1972 and was backed by the working people, decided that only an armed attack from outside the country could overthrow the regime and halt the Beninese revolutionary process.

The attack on the People's Republic of Benin was not an isolated act but part of a large-scale plot for the colonial reconquest of Africa, aimed chiefly at destabilizing the regimes of such progressive countries as Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe.

The strategy of using mercenaries had already been tried in the Playa Girón attack on Cuba in April 1961, an aggression that the Cuban people, led by the illustrious Comrade Fidel Castro, repelled very effectively, inflicting a defeat on Yankee imperialism, the most powerful imperialism in the world today.

The revolutionaries' reply

The People's Republic of Benin considers it a duty to pursue the struggle against mercenarism. For this reason, in January 1978, on the first anniversary of the defeat of the mercenary attack on our territory, we decreed a week of solidarity with all peoples fighting for their liberation and held a conference on mercenarism in Cotonou whose impact was felt even outside Africa.

The Declaration of Cotonou, which emerged from this conference, is very important because of its radically anti-imperialist content. It was published in OSPAAAL's **Tricontinental Bulletin** 109. This international conference decided, among other things, to set up a political-juridical institution to combat the use of mercenaries, oppose the subversion and plunder of Africa and undertake national and international efforts to mobilize people and make them aware of imperialism's practices and machinations against the



peoples in struggle. A call was issued to all the progressive forces in the world to join in these efforts.

The conference also decided to increase its material and political support for the liberation movements, so they could step up their struggles to recover the peoples' sovereignty; for the progressive countries threatened by the imperialists; and for the democratic forces fighting to eliminate neocolonialism, especially in Africa. It also decided to express its immediate and energetic solidarity with the African countries whose independence and territorial integrity are threatened.

The advance of the revolution

Instead of having a demoralizing effect, the imperialist attack on the People's Republic of Benin has resulted in a heightening of the people's determination to continue advancing in spite of all imperialist-imposed difficulties and acts of provocation.

In spite of the difficulties the reaction has caused, the Beninese Revolution has successfully moved toward consolidation by holding the 1st Congress of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin, which decided, among other things, to embark on its first three-year state plan and to put the new Constitution into effect.

For us, this is one more victory over many of the problems caused by counterrevolutionary actions both inside and outside the country. As always, truth is winning out over lies, and the Revolution is winning out over the reaction. Beninese patriots and militants have managed to overcome all the difficulties caused by the counterrevolutionary forces and the reaction and to implement the Constitution — its implementation will weaken the counterrevolutionary forces because it gives the people power and delineates certain democratic structures that will permit the Revolution to develop along Marxist-Leninist lines. For this reason, we consider its implementation to be a great victory and achievement of the Beninese Revolution.

In line with this Constitution, elections to the People's Revolutionary National Assembly have just been held, with massive participation by the people: 90.57 percent of all registered voters. Of them, 97.48 percent voted for the single slate, 1.68 percent voted against it and 0.42 percent abstained.

From November 13 to 18, 1979, new and old members of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin held their 1st Party Congress in Cotonou, called in a spirit of criticism and self-criticism to study all aspects of national life and make important decisions concerning the consistent application of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The satisfactory outcome of the Congress confirms our Party's determination to remain ever loyal to the Marxist-Leninist line.



The Party's new Central Committee has 45 members; the Political Bureau has 13. The Congress proposed President Kérékou as unopposed President of the Republic.² According to the Constitution, the Central Committee proposes a candidate for President of the Republic, who must then be confirmed by the Revolutionary National Assembly.

In closing, Comrades, I would like to thank OSPAAAL once again for having given me this opportunity to talk to you today, the third anniversary of our triumph over the mercenary attack, and to recall President Kérékou's January 16, 1978, message to the people on its first anniversary, a message of great importance to all of us in our ongoing work:

Today, the highest and finest homage we can offer the brave martyrs of our people's democratic Revolution is to remain

² President Mathieu Kérékou was reelected President of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin and was recently reelected President of the Republic.

loyal to the just and noble cause they defended with the greatest sacrifice and to make sure that our daily victories in the struggle for total liberation do not blind us to our weaknesses. The great lesson which the non-aligned countries in particular should learn from this aggression is the need for solidarity in the struggle against imperialism and against the destabilization of progressive regimes, in order to strengthen the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and guarantee freedom, independence, sovereignty, peace and justice for all peoples.

Long live the progressive forces of the world!
Ready for the Revolution!
The struggle continues! ●