

Thomas Sankara Speaks

The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-87

Thomas Sankara speaks : the Burkina Faso
DT555.83.S26 S3 25087



Sankara, Thomas.
NEW COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA (SF)

DT 555.83 .S26 S3 1988
Sankara, Thomas.
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Sankara, Thomas.

Thomas Sankara speaks : the Burkina Faso revolution, 1983-87 / [translated by Samantha Anderson]. -- 1st. ed. -- New York : Pathfinder Press, 1988 (1989 printing).

vi, 260 p., [32] p. of plates : ill. ; 22 cm.

Includes index.

#17322 Midwest \$18.95.

ISBN 0-87348-526-2 (pbk.)

1. Sankara, Thomas--Interviews.
 2. Burkina Faso--Politics and government.
- I. Title

04 JUN 98

18826252

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88-61827

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The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-87

 PATHFINDER
New York London Sydney Toronto

#1-1322

Midwest 4/8. 95

18826252

Translated by Samantha Anderson

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 88-61827
ISBN 0-87348-526-2 paper; ISBN 0-87348-527-0 cloth
Manufactured in the United States of America

First edition, 1988
Second printing, 1989

Pathfinder

410 West Street, New York, New York, 10014

Distributors:

Africa, Europe, and the Middle East:

Pathfinder, 47 The Cut, London, SE1 8LL, Britain

Asia, Australia, and the Pacific:

Pathfinder, P.O. Box 153, Glebe, Sydney, NSW 2037, Australia

Canada:

Pathfinder, 410 Adelaide St. W., Suite 400, Toronto,
Ontario, M5V 1S8, Canada

Caribbean and Latin America:

Pathfinder, 410 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014

New Zealand:

Pathfinder, Box 8730, Auckland, New Zealand

Cover photo: J. Langevin/Sygma

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Preface

On October 15, 1987, Thomas Sankara, the thirty-seven-year-old president of the West African country of Burkina Faso, was assassinated in a counterrevolutionary military coup by troops loyal to Capt. Blaise Compaoré. Twelve of Sankara's aides were also murdered. The revolutionary government established four years earlier on August 4, 1983, was destroyed.

This book's purpose is to make Sankara's political legacy available in English for the first time; his ideas can now be read and studied. It is a contribution to all those in Africa and around the world who, inspired by Sankara's example, need to know the revolutionary course he fought and died for.

In 1970 Thomas Sankara, at age twenty, left what was then Upper Volta to attend military school in Madagascar. While in training there to become an officer in Upper Volta's armed forces, he began to be exposed to political ideas and developments from around the world. He was living in Madagascar in May 1972 when tens of thousands of students and workers took to the streets of the capital city and toppled that country's government. Sankara subsequently spent time in France where he came into contact with a variety of left-wing political views.

After returning to Upper Volta, Sankara became well-known following the December 1974 outbreak of a border war with neighboring Mali. Sankara was praised by the press as a hero for his role in the fighting, although he himself later characterized the war as "useless and unjust."

In early 1983, Sankara was appointed prime minister in the recently formed military government headed by President Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo. Sankara used his post to issue strong anti-imperialist statements and to urge the people of Upper Volta to organize themselves to defend their rights against both domestic and foreign monied interests. Along with other radical-minded junior officers, Sankara came into increasing conflict with proimperialist forces in the government. On May 17, 1983, he was deposed as prime minis-

ter and placed under arrest by these elements.

Within days, thousands of young people took to the streets demanding Sankara's freedom. Some of his supporters made their way to Pô, near the southern border with Ghana, where they received military training from rebel troops under the command of Capt. Blaise Compaoré. On August 4, these forces acted to end the military stalemate with the Ouédraogo regime. Two hundred and fifty soldiers marched on the capital city of Ouagadougou and, in collaboration with other opponents of the regime, freed Sankara from house arrest and overthrew Ouédraogo. Sankara became president of the new National Council of the Revolution. Thousands poured into the streets in celebration the next morning.

Most of the world took little note of what happened in Upper Volta that August 4. Even to those who did, it appeared to be just another in the series of military coups in that country over the previous seventeen years. Thomas Sankara was virtually unknown outside West Africa.

As the political course of the new government under Sankara's leadership became known during its first year, however, revolutionary-minded people throughout the world started to follow what was happening there. It was clear that a deep-going revolution was unfolding in one of the poorest countries in the world.

A French colony until official independence in 1960, Upper Volta bore the scars of modern imperialist domination imposed on pre-capitalist forms of exploitation. The infant mortality rate in 1981 was 208 for every 1,000 live births — the highest in the world; 92 percent of the population, and 98 percent in the countryside, were illiterate in a country with some sixty different ethnic, tribal, and language groups; the average yearly income was \$150; there was one doctor for every 50,000 people.

At the time of the revolution, 90 percent of Upper Volta's 7 million people lived and toiled in the countryside. In addition to paying a government head tax dating from colonial days, peasants performed compulsory labor for village chiefs. Only 10 percent used draft animals for plowing, while the rest used only the most basic hand tools for agriculture. With the continual southward advance of the Sahara desert — a product of imperialist-imposed patterns of agriculture and trade — drought and famine had plagued the country since at least 1970.

To provide water for their families, peasant women made daily round-trips on foot of as much as ten miles to reach the nearest well. Many still faced age-old forms of oppression such as forced mar-

riages, the bride price, and female circumcision.

In the few fertile areas near rivers, thousands were still losing their sight from onchocerciasis, or river blindness, by middle age. This disease, caused by worms spread by black flies that breed in fast-moving water, forced thousands off arable land.

Upper Volta had a minuscule modern working class, made up of some 20,000 factory workers employed mostly in small-scale handicraft production and manufacturing. Even modest-sized modern industrial plants were practically nonexistent with the exceptions of some cotton and textile mills, a bicycle assembly factory, a sugar mill, a soap factory, and a handful of other light manufacturing. Construction, public works, and transportation employed another 10,000 people. There were around 40,000 civil servants, teachers, and other workers as well.

The democratic and anti-imperialist revolution inherited a legacy of misery, exploitation, and oppression. The new revolutionary government led by Sankara faced tremendous problems, but the road to resolving them had been opened. Committees for the Defense of the Revolution mobilized the population for massive immunization campaigns; irrigation projects; defense; school and road building; and literacy drives in the three main indigenous languages. Organizations of youth, women, and elders were initiated.

The prices peasants received for basic food crops were increased and reforestation projects were begun. The head tax was abolished and compulsory labor performed for village chiefs was outlawed. The land was nationalized to guarantee peasants access to the soil and to the products of their labor. Basic health-care services were made available to millions for the first time, and infant mortality fell dramatically, to 145 for every 1,000 live births by 1985. River blindness was effectively brought under control by 1987 through cooperation with a United Nations–sponsored program.

The tasks posed by Burkina Faso's backward class structure made the character of its revolution different from many other democratic, anti-imperialist revolutions. At the same time, it faced a fundamental challenge common to all revolutions today: drawing the working people into political activity in their own interests. Sankara sought to lead the Burkinabè masses toward becoming the initiators of social and political change, not the objects of a government bureaucracy and officer caste alien to their lives and concerns. Despite the difficulties, real progress was made.

Sankara explained on August 4, 1987, at the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the revolution, that “for the new society, we

must have a new people, a people that has its own identity, knows what it wants and how to assert itself, and understands what will be necessary to reach the goals it has set for itself. Our people, after four years of revolution, are the embryo of this new people. The unprecedented decline of passive resignation among our people is a tangible sign of this. The Burkinabè people as a whole believe a better future is possible.”

“We must assimilate the main lesson of this experience,” Sankara said. “The democratic and popular revolution needs a convinced people, not a conquered people — a people that is truly convinced, not submissive and passively enduring its destiny.”

Readers can judge for themselves in these pages how Sankara practiced internationalism, an internationalism completely intertwined with his commitment to defend the interests of the Burkinabè toilers. He fought for Nicaragua’s right to live in peace; for breaking all ties to the apartheid regime in South Africa; for united action to repudiate the Third World debt owed to imperialist governments and banks; for concrete aid to national liberation movements from the African National Congress of South Africa and the Polisario Front of the Western Sahara, to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia. He defended the links forged between Burkina Faso and neighboring Ghana, which, like Burkina, had been the target of hostility and attack by Washington, London, Paris, and the International Monetary Fund.

Sankara publicly expressed his deep admiration for the Cuban revolution and its communist leadership and visited Cuba twice during the four years of the revolution. In 1984 the Cuban government presented Sankara with the José Martí Order. “Our revolution reserves it for very specific cases,” explained Armando Hart, a member of the Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau, in his speech at the ceremony. “It is a token of well-deserved recognition for those who have rendered outstanding service to the cause of their people, to international relations between our countries; to dignity and honor; or to the struggle against imperialism, colonial and neocolonial domination, and for genuine national liberation. You, Comrade Thomas Sankara, combine all these qualities.”

Sankara electrified those who heard him speak in Harlem in October 1984 while visiting New York City to address the United Nations. On November 8, 1986, he spoke on behalf of 180 international delegations gathered in Managua, Nicaragua, to a rally of 200,000 people commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding

of the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the tenth anniversary of the death in combat of its principal founder, Carlos Fonseca.

Millions of African youth identified with Sankara's implacable opposition to both moral and material corruption, his willingness to speak out and concretely defend the most oppressed, and his confidence and revolutionary optimism. He quickly became known from Accra to Harare to Cuba's Isle of Youth.

Thousands of youth demonstrated this sense of identification on the morning after Sankara's assassination, and for many days thereafter, when they gathered at the site of the shallow graves in which his body and those of his murdered supporters had been hurriedly dumped. Many placed handwritten notes on Sankara's grave with messages such as, "We are all Sankara," and "Sankara, cowardly murdered by traitors."

One week before his murder, Sankara spoke to a gathering in Ouagadougou commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of one of this century's great communist leaders, Cuban revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara. "Fearless youth," Sankara said, "youth thirsty for dignity, thirsty for courage, thirsty for ideas and for the vitality that he symbolizes in Africa — sought out Che Guevara to drink from the source, the life-giving source that Che's revolutionary heritage represented to the world." Thomas Sankara himself learned from that heritage and his ideas have added to it.

"If you kill Sankara, tomorrow there will be twenty more Sankaras," he defiantly predicted in the face of threats against the revolution in October 1983. For all those thirsty for revolutionary ideas, this book is a contribution to that tomorrow.

* * *

The contents of this book span the period from March 1983 to October 1987. Over three-quarters of the pieces are published here for the first time in English. All the speeches and interviews have been newly translated except "Nicaragua Must Be Supported by All of Us," Sankara's speech in Managua, Nicaragua, on November 8, 1986, which was translated by the Managua Bureau of the socialist newsweekly the *Militant* and the monthly *Perspectiva Mundial*.

The titles under which speeches and interviews appear were chosen by the editor. A small number of footnotes have been added to the end of several pieces as an aid to readers. In addition, readers will find a chronology of events and a glossary of individuals and terms.

Samantha Anderson translated and edited the book. Its publication

would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of Burkinabè and other Africans living in New York, Montreal, and Paris. They provided many items for the book and helped with difficult aspects of the transcription of tapes and the translation.

Pathfinder gratefully acknowledges the many photographs provided by the José Martí Foreign Languages Publishing House of Havana, Cuba, and Pathfinder/Pacific and Asia of Sydney, Australia; *Barricada*, the daily newspaper of the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua; David Gakunzi, editor of the Paris magazine, *Coumbite*; Margaret Novicki, editor of *Africa Report* in New York; and Ernest Harsch, who also provided several of the speeches included in the book.

Doug Cooper
July 1988

Chronology

1949-1979

- December 21, 1949 Thomas Sankara born in Yako, Upper Volta.
- December 11, 1958 Republic of Upper Volta proclaimed an "autonomous state" within short-lived French Community; Maurice Yaméogo elected president, December 1959.
- August 5, 1960 Official independence from France.
- January 3, 1966 Mass demonstrations in Upper Volta against government austerity measures; coup installs Lt. Col. Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana as head of military regime.
- 1966 Sankara enters military preparatory school in Ouagadougou; graduates, 1969.
- 1970 Enters military academy in Antsirabe, Madagascar.
- 1972 While Sankara is in Madagascar, strike among medical students begins there in January; protests involving tens of thousands of students and workers in the capital topple the president in May. After returning home, Sankara attends session at parachute school in Pau, France.
- December 1974-
January 1975 First war between Upper Volta and Mali.
- December 17-
18, 1975 Two-day general strike wins wage increases and tax cuts for workers.
- 1976 Sankara takes command of new National Training Center for Commandos in Pô, Upper Volta.
- January-May 1978 Sankara attends training session at parachute school in Rabat, Morocco, and meets Blaise Compaoré for first time.
- May 24-31, 1979 Strike by four union federations obtains release of imprisoned trade unionists.

1980

- October 1-
November 22 Strike by teachers' unions against erosion of purchasing power and victimization of members; becomes general strike on October 4-5 and November 4-5.

November 25 Coup by army chief of staff Col. Saye Zerbo ousts General Lamizana; Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress (CMRPN) formed with Zerbo as head.

1981

September 9 Having refused to join CMRPN government, Sankara sends Zerbo a letter of protest following public announcement of Sankara's appointment as secretary to the president in charge of information; Sankara subsequently accepts post on temporary basis.

1982

April Voltaic Union Confederation (CSV) organizes three-day strike against ban on right to strike.

April 12 Sankara resigns from CMRPN government; he is arrested and sent to Dédougou to await court-martial; Compaoré and Henri Zongo also resign from CMRPN and are arrested.

November 1 CMRPN suspends right to strike.

November 7 Coup by Col. Gabriel Somé Yoryan ousts Zerbo; Provisional Council for the Salvation of the People formed and becomes Council for the Salvation of the People (CSP) on November 26 with Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo as president; Sankara and other junior officers who support him, including Jean-Baptiste Lingani, Compaoré, and Zongo, do not participate in coup.

1983

January 10 Sankara designated prime minister by CSP.

March 7-12 Sankara attends New Delhi Summit Conference of the Nonaligned Movement; meets Cuban President Fidel Castro, Mozambican President Samora Machel, Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, and others.

March 26 CSP-sponsored mass rally of thousands in Ouagadougou where Sankara gives major speech.

April 30 Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi visits Ouagadougou.

May 15 Sankara speaks at mass CSP rally in Bobo Dioulasso.

May 16 Guy Penne, adviser to French President Mitterrand on African affairs, arrives in Ouagadougou.

May 17 Coup by CSP members, including Colonel Somé Yo-

- ryan and Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo. Sankara, Lingani, and others arrested; Sankara imprisoned in military camp in Ouahigouya; Zongo and Compaoré evade arrest; Compaoré returns to Pô, where he commands National Training Center for Commandos, and organizes resistance to coup; Zongo subsequently surrenders from his fortified position in Ouagadougou.
- May 20-22 Thousands take to streets to demand freedom for Sankara, forcing Ouédraogo to issue declaration on May 27 freeing political prisoners; Sankara returns to Ouagadougou on May 30 under house arrest.
- June-August Compaoré continues to resist in Pô; supporters of Sankara, left-wing activists, and others come to Pô and receive military training.
- August 4 Compaoré and 250 others free Sankara and others from house arrest; Ouédraogo regime overthrown. National Council of the Revolution (CNR) takes power with Sankara as president; Sankara calls for formation of mass Committees for the Defense of the Revolution in radio broadcast to population.
- August 5 Ouagadougou residents and others take to streets to celebrate.
- August 7 Massive march of support for National Council of the Revolution in Ouagadougou.
- September 30 Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings, Ghanaian head of state and government, meets with Sankara in Pô.
- October 2 Sankara presents "Political Orientation Speech," on behalf of CNR.
- October 31 Upper Volta elected to UN Security Council for two-year term.
- November 4-8 Bold Union military maneuvers held with Ghana.
- December Economic, scientific, and technical cooperation agreement signed with Cuba.
- December 21 President Eduardo dos Santos of Angola stops in Ouagadougou for meeting with Sankara.

1984

- January 3 People's Revolutionary Courts begin first session; among those tried are the former president, Sangoulé Lamizana, who is acquitted, and three of his collaborators; deliberations are broadcast over national radio.
- Early February CNR decrees abolition of tribute payments and obligatory labor to traditional chiefs in countryside.

- February 10-12 Rawlings makes official visit to Ouagadougou.
- March 20-21 National Union of African Teachers of Upper Volta (SNEAHV) leadership, associated with banned Voltaic Progressive Front, provokes strike against the revolutionary government after three of its leaders are arrested on charges of subversion.
- March 22 National Council of the Revolution fires 1,500 teachers.
- March 31 Sankara leaves for official visit to Algeria, Mauritania, and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.
- April 8 Land distributed in Ouagadougou for housing construction.
- April 26 Sourou Valley project launched to irrigate 16,000 hectares (39,500 acres) of land near Ouagadougou.
- May 27 Official visit to Ivory Coast cancelled after Ivory Coast President Félix Houphouët-Boigny refuses Sankara authorization to meet with Burkinabè students and workers in Abidjan, the capital.
- May 26-27 Counterrevolutionary plot linked to proimperialist exile, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, uncovered; of those arrested and tried, seven are executed shortly thereafter.
- June 23 Sankara begins lengthy trip through Africa; visits Ethiopia, Angola, Congo, Mozambique, Gabon, and Madagascar.
- July 12 Compulsory military service established.
- August 4 First anniversary of revolution; thousands of armed militia members march in Ouagadougou; Republic of Upper Volta renamed Burkina Faso (Land of Upright Men), a combination of words from widely spoken Jula and Mooré languages; agrarian reform law nationalizes all land and mineral wealth.
- August 19 Sankara dissolves first cabinet; new cabinet is formed shortly after.
- September 22 Day of solidarity with housewives proclaimed in Ouagadougou; men encouraged to go to market and prepare meals to experience for themselves conditions faced by women.
- September 25-30 Sankara's first visit to Cuba, where he is awarded the José Martí Order.
- October Sankara becomes chairman of West African Economic Community.
- October 1 National Council of the Revolution decree cancels long-standing head tax on rural Burkinabè; launches People's Development Program, which

- lasts until December 1985.
- October 4 Sankara speaks at Thirty-ninth Session of the UN General Assembly in New York.
- November 5-9 Sankara visits People's Republic of China.
- November 12-15 Sankara attends Twentieth Summit of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; helps lead successful fight to admit Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.
- November 25 Fifteen-day mobilization begins to vaccinate all Burkinabè under age fifteen against meningitis, yellow fever, and measles; Cuban volunteers participate; 2.5 million children in Burkina immunized.
- December 3 3,000 delegates attend national conference on budget in Ouagadougou; adopt proposals to deduct one month's pay from salaries of top civil service employees and military officers, half a month's pay from other civil servants to help pay for social development projects.
- December 31 Sankara announces suspension of all residential rents for 1985 and start of massive public housing construction program.

1985

- Campaign launched to plant 10 million trees in 1985 to slow down the southern advance of Sahara desert.
- February 1 Battle for the Railroad launched to build new railway from Ouagadougou to Tambao in the north.
- February 12 Sankara attends meeting of the Entente Council in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast; thousands take to streets to greet his arrival.
- March 1-8 National conference on women's emancipation in Ouagadougou draws 3,000.
- March 17-23 Team Work military maneuvers with Ghana.
- August 4 Second anniversary of revolution; all-female parade emphasizes steps toward equality for women.
- September 10 Special meeting of Entente Council in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, reveals mounting hostility by conservative regimes in the region to Burkina revolution and Ghana.
- December 25 Burkina bombed by Malian planes; second Mali-Burkina war lasts five days; 100 Burkinabè and Malians killed; cease-fire signed on December 29.

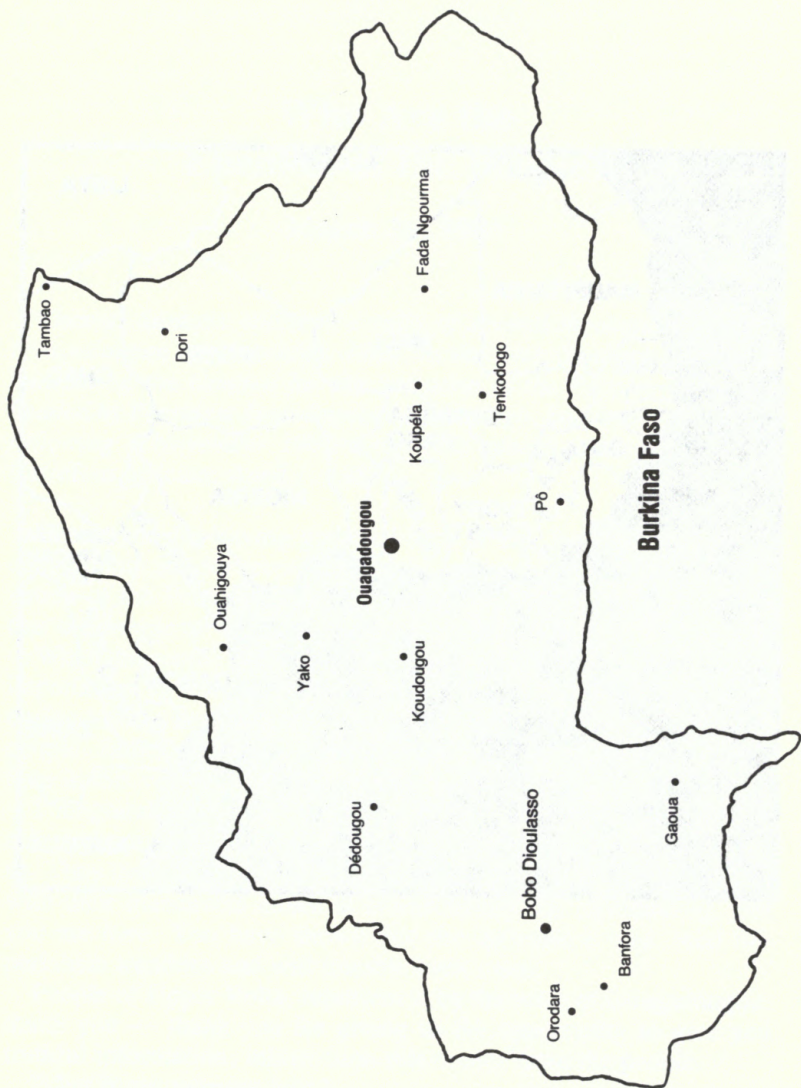
1986

- January 3 Sankara releases all Malian prisoners of war.
- February-April Alpha Commando literacy campaign, conducted in nine indigenous languages, involves 35,000 people throughout country.
- March 31-April 4 First National Conference of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.
- August 4 Third anniversary of revolution; five-year economic plan is announced.
- August 27 Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega arrives for official visit.
- September 3 Sankara addresses Eighth Summit Conference of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- October 6-12 Sankara visits the Soviet Union.
- November 8 Sankara stops in Cuba en route to Nicaragua, meets with Fidel Castro; speaks in Nicaragua on behalf of 180 international delegations at rally marking twenty-fifth anniversary of founding of the Sandinista National Liberation Front and tenth anniversary of the death of Carlos Fonseca.
- November 9 Sankara receives Carlos Fonseca Order. Returns to Cuba for two days of discussions with Raúl Castro.
- November 17 French President François Mitterrand visits Ouagadougou; Sankara denounces French ties to apartheid regime in South Africa.

1987

- By the beginning of the year, UN-assisted program brings river blindness, one of Burkina's worst health problems for generations, effectively under control.
- March 8 Sankara speaks at International Women's Day celebration in Ouagadougou.
- March 30-April 3 Second National Conference of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.
- April 11 Sankara issues declaration launching National Peasants Union of Burkina.
- August 4 Fourth anniversary celebration held in Bobo Dioulasso.
- October 2 Sankara speaks in Tenkodogo on fourth anniversary of "Political Orientation Speech."
- October 8 Sankara gives speech opening Che Guevara photo exhibit to mark twentieth anniversary of Guevara's

- assassination in Bolivia.
- October 8-11 **Bambata Pan-African Anti-Apartheid Conference** held in Ouagadougou; representatives from twenty-nine countries and forty different organizations attend. Sankara speaks at closing news conference.
- October 15 **Sankara is assassinated in counterrevolutionary coup** along with twelve aides; **October 15 Popular Front**, led by **Blaise Compaoré**, dissolves **National Council of the Revolution** and calls on the population to demonstrate support for coup; instead, beginning early the next morning and continuing for many days, thousands file past the makeshift grave where Sankara's body is buried.





Who Are the Enemies of the People?

March 26, 1983

Thomas Sankara spoke to a rally of several thousand people in Ouagadougou on March 26, 1983. At the time, Sankara was prime minister of the Council for the Salvation of the People. The CSP, headed by President Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, had been established following a November 1982 coup. This speech is translated from Carrefour africain, April 1, 1983.

Thank you for having gathered here at this January 3 Square. I congratulate you for responding to the call of the Council for the Salvation of the People (CSP) because by doing this you have shown that the people of Upper Volta are a mighty people.

When the people stand up, imperialism trembles. As it watches us, imperialism is worried. It trembles. Even now imperialism is wondering how to break the ties being forged between the CSP and the people. Imperialism is trembling. It is trembling with fear because here in this very town of Ouagadougou we are going to bury it.

I congratulate you for coming to show those who disparage us, inside and outside the country, that they are wrong. They misjudged us. They thought they could stop the CSP's march toward the people with their maneuvers aimed at brainwashing and intimidating. But you are here. You have shown that the opposite is true. And imperialism trembles and will tremble even more.

People of Upper Volta, represented by the town of Ouagadougou, thank you — thank you for giving us the opportunity to give you truthful information, information that comes from the people.

What is our purpose here?

Our purpose is to tell you exactly what our enemies want, what the CSP wants, and what you, the people, have a right to. The people love liberty and democracy and will thus combat all enemies of liberty and democracy.

But who are these enemies of the people?

They are to be found both here at home and abroad. At this very moment they are trembling, but you must expose them. You must drive them back into their holes. The enemies of the people here inside the country are all those who have illicitly taken advantage of their social position and their place in the bureaucracy to enrich themselves. By means of bribery, maneuvers, and forged documents they have become shareholders in different companies. They are now involved in financing businesses and obtaining approval for this or that enterprise — in the guise of helping Upper Volta. These are the enemies of the people. They must be exposed. They must be combated. We will combat them with you.

Who are the enemies of the people? They are that group of bourgeois who enrich themselves dishonestly through fraud and bribery, through the corruption of state officials, so that they can bring all kinds of products into Upper Volta, increasing the price tenfold. These are the enemies of the people. This section of the bourgeoisie must be fought against, and we will fight against it.

Who are the enemies of the people? They are the men in politics who travel through the countryside exclusively at election time. These politicians are convinced that only they can make our country work. The CSP, however, is convinced that Upper Volta's seven million people represent seven million political beings capable of leading this country. These enemies of the people must be exposed and combated. We will combat them with you.

The enemies of the people are likewise those who keep us in ignorance. Under the cover of spiritual guidance and tradition, they exploit the people instead of serving their real spiritual needs and their real social interests. They must be fought against, and we will fight them.

Let me ask you: do you like these enemies of the people, yes or no?

[Shouts of "No!"]

Do you like them?

[Shouts of "No!"]

So we must fight them.

Will you fight them here at home?

[Shouts of "Yes!"]

On with the fight!

The enemies of the people are also beyond our borders. Their base is among unpatriotic people here in our midst at every level of our society — civilian and military men, men and women, old and young,

in town and country alike. These enemies from abroad — neo-colonialism, imperialism — are among us.

From its base among these stateless men, those who have rejected their homeland, who have rejected Upper Volta, who have, in fact, rejected the people of Upper Volta, this enemy abroad is organizing a series of attacks. These will come in two stages. First will come the nonviolent and then the violent stage.

At this moment, we are living through the nonviolent stage. This enemy abroad — imperialism, neocolonialism — is attempting to sow confusion in the minds of the Voltaic people. According to their newspapers, radios, and televisions Upper Volta is all fire and blood.

Well, you are here, people of Upper Volta. Your presence proves that imperialism is wrong and that its lies will never stick. You are here. You are here and on your feet. It is imperialism's turn to tremble today.

A foreign journalist in a faraway country, sitting in his swivel chair in an air-conditioned office, dared to report that the CSP's informational meetings have failed. Have they failed? You are here, answer me.

[Shouts of "No!"]

Have they failed?

[Shouts of "No!"]

I hope that imperialism can hear you answer no. Say it again. Have they failed?

[Shouts of "No!"]

You see, imperialism is wrong. But imperialism is a bad student. Even though it's been defeated, though it's been sent out of the classroom, it comes back again. It's a bad student. Imperialism never draws the lessons from its failures. It's down in South Africa cutting African throats — just because Africans there are thinking about freedom, as you are today. Imperialism is down there crushing the Arab peoples — that's Zionism.

Imperialism is everywhere, making us think like it, submit to it, and go along with its maneuvers by spreading its culture far and wide with the help of misinformation. We must bar the road to this imperialism.

As I said, it will proceed to a violent stage. It is this imperialism that landed troops in certain countries we know. Imperialism armed those who are killing our brothers in South Africa. Imperialism again is the assassin of the Lumumbas, Cabrals, and Kwame Nkrumahs.

But I'll tell you something, in fact I'll promise you — because I have confidence in you and you have confidence in the CSP — that

thanks to the education we will give our people, when this imperialism comes here we will bury it. We will bury it right here. Ouagadougou will be its *bolibana* — the end of the road for imperialism.

Imperialism is using its more subtle methods to try to sow division within the Council for the Salvation of the People. Already it has managed to create anxiety and fear in the minds of the people. But we are not afraid. For the first time in Upper Volta something fundamental is happening, something completely new. Until now, the people have never had the power to establish political democracy. While the army has always had the possibility of taking power, it has never wanted democracy.

For the very first time we see an army that wants both power and democracy, and that is genuinely seeking to ally with the people. For the first time, too, we see the masses come out in impressive numbers and reach out to the army. We believe this army, which is taking the destiny of the Voltaic people in its hands, is the people's army. This is why I welcome the placards here that talk of the people's army.

In order to weaken us, our enemies at home and abroad rely on a certain number of factors. I'll mention some and leave you to complete the list. They would have us believe that the CSP is blocking the normal functioning of the state machinery because we've made some decisions to the detriment of certain civil service executives. We have taken such decisions because we think that there are those who, at this stage of the revolution, cannot keep pace. There are functionaries who don't come into the office till 9:00 a.m. and leave again at 10:30 a.m. to go to their orchards and watch over their villas. Is this the way it should be?

Our enemies claim we are blocking the state's functioning when we get rid of these kinds of functionaries. But who is afraid of whom?

We are with the people. They are against the people. The decisions we take will be decisions against the enemies of the people, since they will be for the people — the militant people of Upper Volta. Are you in favor of keeping these corrupt functionaries in our administration?

[*Shouts of "No!"*]

So we must chase them out. We will chase them out.

Are you in favor of maintaining these corrupt men in our army?

[*Shouts of "No!"*]

So we must drive them out and we will.

This may well cost us our lives, but part of our job is to take risks and dare to act, and you are here to continue the fight at all costs.

Our enemies say that the Council for the Salvation of the People is preparing to carry out nationalizations, that we are about to confiscate their property. Who is afraid of whom?

If you take a walk around Ouagadougou and make a list of the mansions you see, you will note that they belong to just a minority. How many of you who have been assigned to Ouagadougou from the farthest corners of the country have had to move every night because you've been thrown out of the house you have rented? And every day, the owner raises the price a little more. There will be no problems for those who have acquired their houses by regular means, they need not be worried. But to those who have acquired houses and land through corruption we say: start to tremble. If you have stolen, tremble, because we will come after you. Not only will the CSP come after you, but the people themselves will take care of you — yes or no?

[Shouts of "Yes!"]

Honest citizens, have no fear, even if you own 1,000 villas. But you, the dishonest, even if you own only a tiny two-room place in a run-down part of town, start to tremble, because the CSP is coming! We didn't come this far only to stop halfway along such a promising road. We are not here to sell out or betray the people.

They say we want to carry out nationalizations. The CSP does not understand and will never understand, just as you, too, will never understand, how certain people can come and set themselves up in Upper Volta, start an enterprise for which they've been granted favors — all kinds of tax exemptions — on the pretext of creating jobs and contributing to the economic development of the country and then, after a certain number of years of the most brazen exploitation, announce personnel cuts.

On what conditions were you granted these favors? On the condition that you create jobs for the Voltaic people. Today, when you've squeezed the lemon dry, you want to throw it away.

No! To this we say no!

Our enemies say that we have proclaimed freedom of expression and of the press only to begin to restrict this freedom. As Comrade Jean-Baptiste Lingani said earlier — and presently Comrade Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo will say it better than I can — in no way do we wish to put an end to freedom. But we say that the freedom to criticize brings with it the freedom to protest. And freedom for honest men should not mean freedom for the dishonest. We will strip the

liberties of those who use the freedoms created by the CSP to attack the CSP and, in that way, to attack the Voltaic people. We will take away their freedom to harm the people and leave them free to serve the people. We cannot allow the freedom to lie to and brainwash the collective consciousness of the Voltaic people. This would be to work against the interests of the masses of Upper Volta.

They have also said that certain elements from the CSP, like Capt. Thomas Sankara, have been to Libya and Korea, and that this is dangerous for our country.

Well, people of Upper Volta, here is something to think about: Libya has never done anything to harm us; Korea has never exploited Upper Volta; Libya has never attacked us. But we know of countries that have attacked Upper Volta, that have put our parents in prison. Our grandparents died on the battlefield for these countries. We cooperate with them and no one complains.

Sangoulé [Lamizana] went to Libya. Saye Zerbo has been to Libya and Korea — why didn't anyone complain? There is dishonesty involved here somewhere. Yesterday, preparations were made for a visit by Saye Zerbo to see Muammar el-Qaddafi in one of Qaddafi's planes. They've been publicizing this. And yet when we go to Libya today, they complain.

But we went to Libya in a responsible and intelligent manner! We went to Libya after Qaddafi had sent us three delegations. We told the Libyan leaders that we had nothing against Libya, but that we have positions of our own — that we are not virgins when it comes to ideology. We said we were ready to collaborate with Libya, but that we were also prepared to express — in a responsible way — any disagreements we may have with Libya. We decided to go only after receiving three delegations. And we established concrete conditions in line with the needs of the Voltaic people.

When cement starts to arrive from Tripoli, which we will be able to sell at a good price, will the people be pleased or not?

[Shouts of "Yes!"]

Why should we not go and negotiate with Qaddafi if we want his cement? When we negotiate deals worth two to three million CFA francs¹ with certain countries, they talk about it on the radio. The deal with Qaddafi is worth 3.5 billion CFA francs. Are you pleased — yes or no?

[Shouts of "Yes!"]

Our people like cooperation between states that respect their peoples. The people of Upper Volta don't want anyone to tell them what path they should take. To those who attempt to housebreak us or

tyrannize us in the area of diplomatic matters, we say no! We are free to go where we wish.

And I'll tell you something — a secret — but don't repeat it to the imperialists. Those who reproach us because we went to Libya have developed their countries with Qaddafi's dollars. Do they think they are shrewder than we are? Why do they deal with Qaddafi? Who is shrewder than whom?

We will go anywhere in the interests of the Voltaic masses. We have seen the social achievements in Libya — schools, hospitals, houses — all free.

How has Libya managed to carry out this social investment? Because of oil, yes, but this oil existed under the former regime of King Idriss. It was exploited by the imperialists and for the benefit of the king. The people drew absolutely no benefit from it. Today, Libyans have free houses and asphalt roads. If we could transform Upper Volta tomorrow the way Qaddafi has transformed Libya would you be pleased, yes or no?

[Shouts of "Yes!"]

So by drawing on the good sides of other countries that we deal with, we are simply carrying out our policy of diplomatic independence and applying one of the CSP's rules — to work for the good of the people.

There is no shame in getting on one's knees if it is in the interests of the people. At this very moment, as we address you, we know there are those in the crowd who would very much like to shoot us. These are the risks we take, convinced that it is in the interests of the people. So we say to these people: "Shoot!" And when you shoot, your bullets will turn back and hit you. This is what we call the triumph of the people over its enemies. Today, we speak with the force of our people, not just our own force.

The enemies of the people say that certain factions of the Council for the Salvation of the People view this or that country favorably, or are in such and such a camp, the pro-Western camp, and so on. We say that we are against no one's camp. We are rather for all camps. We repeated this at New Delhi before the Nonaligned nations: we are for all the camps, and we say, too, that he who loves his own people also loves other peoples. We love the Voltaic people, the Nicaraguan people, the people of Algeria, Libya, Ghana, Mali, and all other peoples.

Those who do not love their own people do not love the Voltaic people. Those who are worried today by the transformations occurring in Upper Volta do not love their people. They impose their will

through dictatorships and police operations against their people. We are not like that.

They say we have a certain admiration for Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings. Rawlings is a man! Every man must have friends and enemies. If Rawlings has admirers in Upper Volta, whose fault is that? It is imperialism's fault. They have created a situation in Ghana that forced those now in power to fight for the interests of the people of Ghana. When Ghana was prosperous, we in Upper Volta had no qualms about taking full advantage of their prosperity. Today, when Ghana has difficulties, why would we turn our backs?

No, we are sincere. The people maintain their affection. Individuals may perhaps betray, but peoples do not betray each other. The people of Ghana need the Voltaic people, and we need them.

When Rawlings closed his borders,² they protested. They don't like Rawlings. He closes his borders, stays at home, and they protest?

Well, Ghana can impose nothing on us nor we on it. Rawlings can't give us lessons, nor we him. However, when he says "No way for *kalabule*!" — no to corruption — he says something that is in the interests of the people of Ghana and of all other peoples. The Voltaic people, too, are against corruption.

The enemies of the CSP also say that we are "reds," that is, communists. That gives us a great deal of satisfaction, because it proves that our enemies are in disarray — that they have lost their bearings and no longer know what to say or do. We have done nothing of a communist nature here. We have simply called for cleaning things up, social justice, liberty, and democracy.

When we took the decision to quash the ordinance issued by the Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress forbidding the opening of bars at certain times, we heard the Voltaic people say: we have our interests, and we prefer these folks in the CSP, whether they're red or green, communists or not. This is what it means to be close to the masses. It's not the label that counts.

They call us communists to frighten the people. They accuse us of being communists and then tell you that communism is bad. We have no intention of telling you that communism is good or bad. We have only one intention — to tell you what concrete actions we will take, with you and for you, regardless of what label is pinned on them.

The enemies of the people also say that we are attacking foreigners. No. We love all foreigners, those who are here today and those who will come in the future. We take as a given that they love the Voltaic people. We don't assume they are here to exploit us.

The CSP intends to create, together with you, the conditions for mobilization and work. We want the people to organize themselves for work and for the battle we are going to wage.

We know, for example, that certain regions of Upper Volta, such as Orodara, have been very successful at growing fruits and vegetables. We know too that in these regions the produce rots because of the lack of means to transport it. So we think that the people should be mobilized in Orodara to build landing strips so that planes can come in. The mangoes will reach Ouagadougou and Dori and that will be good for the people of Upper Volta.

This is the kind of work we're talking about. Every day now we should be beginning large-scale construction projects, and we want you to mobilize massively to carry them out. We want to build a monument in Ouagadougou — a people's theater. We'll build similar things in every region, relying on our youth. You will build them in order to prove that you are capable of transforming your existence and the concrete conditions you live in. You don't need us to go looking for foreign moneylenders to do this. You only need us to grant you liberty and rights. This will be done.

In addition, the Council for the Salvation of the People intends to put a stop to certain practices. When you arrive at a hospital with a hemorrhage or a fracture, for example, you are ignored — even if you're about to pass out — just because you're a man of the people, a worker, so that some minister or president or prime minister's cold can be treated. We will put a stop to this; we must denounce it every day.

Be confident that we will put a stop to the misappropriation of funds, speculation, and illicit enrichment. This is why we are locking up, and will continue to lock up, all those who steal money from the people.

We tell the people to be ready to fight, to be ready to take up arms and resist every time it is necessary to do so. Have no fear. Nothing will happen. The enemy knows that the Voltaic people are now mature.

They say that two years is too short a time for the transition to normal constitutional life. We say it's more than sufficient, because if you provide freedom of speech under conditions of total freedom and democracy the people will tell you what they want in thirty minutes. We don't need two years.

The CSP thanks you for your mobilization. We were right to have confidence in you and to join with you, side by side, in this fight against the enemy of the people — imperialism. This is why we

should affirm together:

Down with imperialism! Down with imperialism! Down with imperialism!

Down with the enemies of the people!

Down with the embezzlers of public funds!

Down with the fakers in Upper Volta!

Down with fakery!

Down with the predatory owls that strike in the darkness!

Down with the fence-sitting chameleons!

Down with the ravenous jackals!

Down with the cornered foxes!

Down with the wreckers!

Down with those who hide behind diplomas paid for by the sweat of the people, who are incapable of serving the people, but who use their diplomas to speak in the name of the people!

Down with those who are against the ties between the army and the people!

Down with those who are against the ties between the people and the army!

Down with those against the people who hide under various suits of clothes, black and white!

Imperialism will be buried in Upper Volta. Its lackeys will be buried in Upper Volta.

Long live Upper Volta!

Long live democracy!

Long live liberty!

Thank you. We will meet again very soon.

Notes

1. Approximately 250 CFA francs equaled one U.S. dollar in 1983.
2. Ghana closed its borders following an attempted coup on November 23, 1982.

Struggle for a Bright Future

August 4, 1983

On May 17, 1983, Sankara, Jean-Baptiste Lingani, and others were arrested in a coup organized by President Ouédraogo and senior military officers in the Council for the Salvation of the People. Thousands took to the streets of Ouagadougou in response, demanding freedom for Sankara. Sankara and Lingani were released from prison and placed under house arrest on May 30. Capt. Blaise Compaoré and 250 others marched on Ouagadougou on August 4, freed Sankara and Lingani from house arrest, and overthrew the Ouédraogo regime. Sankara, as president of the new National Council of the Revolution, broadcast the following radio address in French to the people of Upper Volta at 10:00 p.m. on the evening of August 4, 1983. It is translated from a transcription of the broadcast.

People of Upper Volta!

Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers of the national army, together with paramilitary forces, today once again were obliged to intervene into the running of state affairs so as to restore independence and liberty to our country and dignity to our people.

In reality, the patriotic and progressive objectives that brought the Council for the Salvation of the People (CSP) to power on November 7, 1982, were betrayed six months later on May 17, 1983, by individuals vehemently opposed to the Voltaic people's interests and aspirations toward democracy and liberty.

You know who these individuals are who fraudulently wormed their way into the history of our people. They revealed themselves in pitiful fashion first by their two-faced policies and later by their open alliance with all those conservative and reactionary forces who are capable of nothing more than serving the interests of the enemies of the people, the interests of foreign domination and neocolonialism.

Today, August 4, 1983, soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers from all the different military branches and units, motivated

by patriotism, decided to sweep away this unpopular regime — a groveling regime of subjugation established on May 17, 1983, by Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo under the leadership of Col. Gabriel Somé Yoryan and his thugs.

Today, August 4, 1983, the patriotic and progressive soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers have thus cleansed the honor of our people and their army and have restored to them their dignity, enabling them to enjoy once again the esteem and respect enjoyed at home and abroad by everyone from Upper Volta during the period from November 7, 1982, to May 17, 1983.

To achieve this honorable goal, the goal of dignity, true independence, and progress for Upper Volta and its people, those involved in the present movement of the Voltaic armed forces have learned the bitter lessons of the experience with the CSP.

On this day, August 4, 1983, we are establishing the National Council of the Revolution (CNR), which will assume state power from this moment on, replacing the regime of the phantom CSP headed by Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, who had already arbitrarily dissolved it.

People of Upper Volta! The National Council of the Revolution calls on every single one of you, man or woman, young or old, to mobilize your active support behind it and be vigilant. We invite the Voltaic people to form Committees for the Defense of the Revolution everywhere in order to fully participate in the CNR's great patriotic struggle and to prevent our enemies here and abroad from harming our people. Political parties are, of course, herewith dissolved.¹

On the international plane, the National Council of the Revolution pledges to respect all agreements between our country and others. Likewise, it maintains Upper Volta's membership in regional, continental, and international organizations.

The National Council of the Revolution is not directed against any country, state, or people. It proclaims its solidarity with all other peoples and its will to live in peace and friendship with all countries, in particular with Upper Volta's neighboring countries.

The basic purpose and main objective of the CNR is to defend the interests of the Voltaic people and fulfill their aspirations toward liberty, genuine independence, and economic and social progress.

People of Upper Volta: forward with the National Council of the Revolution in the great patriotic struggle for a bright future for our country!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Long live the Voltaic people!
Long live the National Council of the Revolution!

Notes

1. While the bourgeois parties were banned with the taking of power, organizations of the left began to function openly.

Power Must Be Conquered by a Conscious People

August 21, 1983

On August 21, 1983, Sankara gave his first news conference as president to the international press. The following major excerpts are translated from a transcript of the news conference, which was broadcast live over Upper Volta's national radio station.

Question: Mr. President, August 4 is seen by certain people as an act of revenge against those who held power after May 17. How would you explain it?

Thomas Sankara: I, too, have heard this explanation. You have to understand that for some people the Voltaic people's problem is simply a problem of cliques. It is completely normal for such people to see each action as an act of revenge, as a recapturing of positions and so on.

For us, August 4 was simply the logical outcome — the concretization — of the popular will that you have been able to witness yourselves here in Upper Volta.

We say, too, that all those who mobilized in Ouagadougou and elsewhere after the famous May 17 coup did so not just because of Captain Sankara and his comrades but as part of a process to which they are very committed — a process aimed at the liberation of the Voltaic people so that they can take charge of their own development and destiny. They fought because they did not accept the blows struck against them. They fought because the Voltaic people's interests were betrayed — a betrayal that they also could not accept.

Thus, if an act of revenge took place, it was the revenge of the people against reactionary forces organized around a few men, a few individuals. It was not the revenge of one group against another.

Question: Mr. President, is the National Council of the Revolution (CNR) a continuation of the pre-May 17 Council for the Salva-

tion of the People (CSP)?

Sankara: We would say yes, that the CNR is a continuation of the pre-May 17 CSP. But it also goes beyond that. The pre-May 17 CSP allowed us to link up with the Voltaic people. It enabled us to help the people express themselves and communicate to us their most sincere and deepest aspirations. It allowed us to become familiar with these aspirations and formulate policies in line with them — the policies of the CSP at that time. These policies were to lead the people toward progressively taking power — toward genuinely assuming power in their own interests.

As you know, the pre-May 17 CSP ended precisely with the events of May 17 — that is, someone, somewhere, betrayed the people, and that betrayal took place on May 17.

Question: Mr. President, in a meeting you had with journalists from *Carrefour africain* when you were prime minister, you said that the CSP was seeking a strategy that would put a stop to military coups in Upper Volta. Now that the destiny of the Voltaic people is in your hands, do you think it is possible for the establishment of the CNR to be the last military intervention into the political affairs of the Voltaic state?

Sankara: We certainly hope so, and we are convinced that the best way to limit the usurpation of power by a group of individuals, military or civilian, is above all to put responsibility in the hands of the people. Coups can be carried out among factions and cliques, but no lasting coup can be carried out against the people. The best way to avoid the army seizing power for itself is thus to involve the Voltaic people in exercising power as of now. This is our aim.

Question: Mr. President, when the CSP came to power on November 7, 1982, many political observers said you were behind it. If this was true, why did you not assume the political leadership of the CSP, thus making it possible to avoid the events of May 17?

Sankara: It is a shame that there are political observers who look at political problems as they would a comic strip — they must have their Zorro, their hero.

No, the problem in Upper Volta is much more serious than that. It is a grave error to seek a man, a star — even going so far as to create one, such as saying that Captain Sankara created the CSP and was the brain behind it.

Let me tell you that November 7 has a complex history, full of details. November 7 gave birth to an extremely heterogeneous re-

gime with many components and inevitable contradictions. My comrades and I made every possible effort to prevent the coup from going ahead on November 7. Curiously, we were only in Ouagadougou by coincidence. And curiously, we had done everything in our power to convince those who had an interest in the coup to abandon their project.

But you must understand that not everyone views political problems the same way. For some, if you have arms and a few units of the army with you, that is sufficient to take power. But others have different convictions. Power must be conquered above all by a conscious people. The question of arms is merely complementary to this, necessary at given moments and under specific circumstances.

This is why it is good for you to know that in carrying out the November 7 coup, some well-concealed players tried to involve others in their project, or at least to achieve their ambitions by using and exploiting others.

These people wanted to install someone — let me name names — they wanted to put Colonel Somé Yoryan in as president of Upper Volta. They also wanted to free certain elements of the Third Republic imprisoned by the Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress (CMRPN).¹

To succeed in this project and attain their goal they needed military backing. The best way for them to obtain this, since they felt — and indeed were — isolated within the army, was to float the proposition throughout the units of the army that all those who wished to liberate the detained officers — Capt. Blaise Compaoré, Capt. Henri Zongo, Captain Sankara, and others, such as Colonel Lingani, who was in danger — should participate in their coup.²

This approach paid off since many military men felt a moral obligation toward these officers. They gave their support and agreed to fight, unaware that the officers — all those I have named — were themselves against the coup and had said so to officers such as Captain Kambouélé and Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, just to name a few. They had explained to these officers the risks and dangers involved in such a coup.

But not everyone sees politics in the same way. Though we spent hours — entire nights — in discussions with these officers in an attempt to convince them, they acted on their plan and the November 7 coup took place. Of course, given the contradictions that arose among them, they were unable to install Colonel Somé Yoryan as head of state. Though certain people were happy to see some elements of the Third Republic freed from prison, there were those who

were disappointed to see other Third Republic elements freed. You must understand these contradictions too.

Of course, they did not hesitate to name Captain Sankara as the strongman and place responsibility for the coup on him, saying to themselves that the bed had been made, so Sankara would have no choice but to lie in it.

I know that the media repeated this information, thus condemning us to accept political responsibilities that we had rejected for political reasons and yet that we were beginning to be forced to accept for strictly political reasons. As you can understand, a regime born in this way could not last very long.

You should know, too, that we always tried — perhaps out of sentimentality, maybe because we were naive, or perhaps simply out of honesty — to win these putschists to a better understanding of things. We did this despite all the contradictions, differences, and opposing views that existed between us, and even though we had greater strength than this putschist clique, both on a military level and on the level of democratic debate with them. Naturally, we also tried to spare them from any violent encounters.

You know that Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo was protected and guarded by commandos trained by us. These commandos maintained all the loyalty and fidelity toward us that elite troops are capable of forging between themselves and their officers. At any moment, we could have carried out a coup against him had we wanted to. We even took risks to prevent coups from being carried out against him.

So you can understand that the November 7 coup was a hard blow against us — an extremely hard blow. At a certain point we submitted our resignation to President Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo. He remembers this. He never made it public, but we gave him our resignation because, as we said at the time, we disagreed with his policies. We knew that he was still receiving orders from somewhere. We also knew that we could not win him to our positions, but we did not want to carry out a coup against him. Instead, we preferred to simply and honestly resign. He never accepted our resignation.

So this is one set of factors involved in the events of November 7. Let us say that there are still mysteries to be uncovered. Maybe history will be able to speak at greater length on this and situate responsibility for the coup more clearly.

Question: Mr. President, coming back to one of your earlier answers, can you set a date at this point when the army will return to the

barracks? And can you also tell us what kind of relations you wish to establish with the political forces that exist in the country and, more generally, what you will do to preserve freedom of speech to which you have been, I believe, very much attached in the past?

Sankara: On your first question, concerning the return of the army to the barracks. You favor this. You have every right to do so. But please understand that for us there are not revolutionaries in the barracks and those outside the barracks. Rather, there are revolutionaries everywhere. The army is a component of the Voltaic people. As such it is subject to the same contradictions as other layers of the population. We brought the power out of the barracks.

You will have noticed that we are the first military regime that did not establish its headquarters in a military garrison. This is very significant — even more so since we have set ourselves up in the seat of the Entente Council.³ You understand the significance of this.

For us, it is not a question of the military taking power one day and giving it up the next. Military personnel must live and suffer with the Voltaic people and fight side by side with them at all times. So there is no deadline we are trying to meet. You are no doubt thinking of the assertion that military personnel should no longer be involved in politics. People in certain milieus in our country were enamored of this idea because for them *certain* military men should no longer be involved in politics. That's what they really meant. The proof is that it was military men in power who said this. For them, certain military men should no longer be involved in politics, so they placed them under house arrest.

With regard to political forces — what kind of relations would you like us to establish? We have met face to face and discussed directly with the leaders — that is with the former leaders — of the former political parties, because as far as we are concerned these parties no longer exist, they have been dissolved.

The matter is quite clear. The relations we have with them are simply the same relations we have with other citizens of Upper Volta, or, if they wish to become revolutionaries also, the same relations as those that exist among revolutionaries. The only relations that can exist today are those among revolutionaries, and those with counter-revolutionaries.

You raised the question of freedom of speech, to which I “was very attached.” I would say that I am very consistent, even if I sometimes change hats. I am quite consistent and am still attached to freedom of speech. I simply state that citizens of Upper Volta will never cease to be free to defend liberty, justice, and democracy.

This is all we will allow.

All those who wish to become involved in this struggle will find a place in our press, in our media, in the columns of our paper, and even in the streets if they wish to defend liberty, freedom of expression, democracy, and justice. Outside the framework of such a struggle, there remains only a struggle by reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries whom we will confront.

Notes

1. Imprisoned elements of the Third Republic refers to members of the government of President Sangoulé Lamizana, overthrown in a 1980 coup by Col. Saye Zerbo's Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress.

2. See the chronology, April 12, 1982.

3. The National Council of the Revolution set up its offices in Ouagadougou in four villas originally constructed in the 1960s for the use of visiting heads of state from members of the Entente Council, a regional trade, investment, and economic development body.

The Political Orientation Speech

October 2, 1983

Sankara presented this speech on October 2, 1983, on behalf of the National Council of the Revolution in a national radio and television broadcast. It is translated, including the subheadings, from a pamphlet published in October 1983 by the Ministry of Information of Upper Volta.

People of Upper Volta!

Comrades, cadres of the revolution!

In the course of this year, 1983, our country has gone through some particularly intense moments, whose impact still remains indelibly stamped on the minds of many citizens. During this period, the struggle of the Voltaic people has gone through ebbs and flows.

Our people have borne the test of heroic struggles and finally triumphed on the now historic night of August 4, 1983. The revolution here has been moving forward irreversibly for nearly two months now — two months in which the fighting people of Upper Volta have mobilized as one behind the National Council of the Revolution (CNR) in order to build a new, free, independent, and prosperous Voltaic society; a new society free from social injustice and international imperialism's century-long domination and exploitation.

As we complete this brief stage of our journey, I invite you to look back with me to draw the lessons necessary for correctly determining our immediate and medium-term revolutionary tasks. By gaining a clear view of the unfolding events, we will strengthen our struggle against imperialism and reactionary social forces all the more.

To sum up, where have we come from and where are we going? Those are the key questions that we must answer clearly, resolutely, and unequivocally, if we wish to go forward with confidence to greater and more resounding victories.

The August revolution is the culmination of the Voltaic people's struggle

The triumph of the August revolution is due not only to the revolutionary blow struck against the sacrosanct reactionary alliance of May 17, 1983. It is also the product of the Voltaic people's struggle against their long-standing enemies. It represents a victory over international imperialism and its national allies; a victory over backward, obscurantist, and sinister forces; and a victory over all the enemies of the people who have plotted and schemed against them.

The August revolution is the culmination of the popular insurrection unleashed following the imperialist plot of May 17, 1983, which was aimed at stemming the rising tide of this country's democratic and revolutionary forces.

This insurrection was symbolized by the courageous and heroic stance of the commandos of the city of Pô, who put up fierce resistance to the proimperialist and antipopular regime of Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo and Colonel Somé Yoryan. It also entailed the participation of the popular, democratic, and revolutionary forces that were able to mount an exemplary resistance in alliance with the soldiers and patriotic officers.

The insurrection of August 4, 1983, the victory of the revolution, and the advent of the National Council of the Revolution thus unquestionably constitute the confirmation and logical outcome of the Voltaic people's struggle against the subjugation of our country, and for the independence, freedom, dignity, and progress of our people. Simplistic and superficial analyses limited to repeating preestablished schemas cannot change the reality of these facts.

The August revolution was thus the victorious heir to the deepening of the people's uprising of January 3, 1966. It was both the continuation of, and raised to a qualitatively higher level, all the great struggles of the people that have been multiplying in recent years, all of which have marked a consistent refusal by the Voltaic people, in particular the working class and the toilers, to be governed as before. The most notable and significant milestones of these great popular struggles are December 1975, May 1979, October and November 1980, April 1982, and May 1983.¹

It is a well-established fact that the great movement of popular resistance that emerged immediately following the reactionary and proimperialist provocation of May 17, 1983, created conditions favorable to the August 4, 1983, events. In fact, the imperialist plot of May 17 precipitated a large-scale regroupment of the democratic

and revolutionary forces and organizations that mobilized during this period, took initiatives, and carried out actions more audacious than any previously known. During this time, the sacrosanct alliance of reactionary forces around the moribund regime labored under its inability to block the advance of the revolutionary forces, which mounted an increasingly open attack on the antipopular and anti-democratic forces in power.

The people's demonstrations of May 20, 21, and 22 met with a broad national response essentially due to their great political significance. They provided concrete proof that an entire people, especially the youth, subscribed openly to the revolutionary ideals defended by those whom the forces of reaction had moved against with such treachery. These demonstrations were of great significance in action, since they expressed the determination of an entire people and its youth who rose to their feet in order to confront concretely the forces of imperialist domination and exploitation. They constituted the most positive proof of the fact that when the people stand on their feet, imperialism and the social forces allied with it tremble.

History and the process by which the popular masses develop political consciousness evolve dialectically outside the laws of reactionary logic. That is why the May 1983 events played a weighty role in accelerating the process of political clarification in our country to the point where the popular masses as a whole made a qualitative leap in their understanding of the situation. The events of May 17 greatly contributed to opening the eyes of the Voltaic people. Imperialism as a system of oppression and exploitation was revealed to them in a brutal and cruel flash.

There are days that hold lessons richer than those of an entire decade. During such days, the people learn with such incredible speed and so profoundly that a thousand days of study are nothing in comparison.

The events of the month of May 1983 allowed the Voltaic people to know its enemies better. Thus, henceforth in Upper Volta, everyone knows who is who, who is with and against whom, and who does what and why.

This kind of situation was a prelude to the massive upheavals that helped lay bare the sharpening class contradictions of Voltaic society. The August revolution thus came as the solution to social contradictions that could no longer be stifled by compromise.

The enthusiastic loyalty of the broad popular masses to the August revolution is the concrete expression of the immense hopes that the Voltaic people place in the establishment of the National Council of

the Revolution. They hope that their deep-going aspirations can finally be achieved — aspirations for democracy, liberty, and independence, for genuine progress, for a restoration of the dignity and grandeur of our homeland, aspirations that have been particularly flouted during twenty-three years of neocolonial rule.

Legacy of twenty-three years of neocolonialism

The establishment of the CNR on August 4, 1983, and the subsequent installation of a revolutionary government in Upper Volta has opened a glorious page in the annals of the history of our people and country. However, the legacy bequeathed to us by twenty-three years of imperialist exploitation and domination is a heavy one. The task of constructing a new society cleansed of all the ills that keep our country in a state of poverty and economic and cultural backwardness will be long and hard.

In the 1960s, French colonialism — harried on all sides, defeated at Dien Bien Phu, and in tremendous difficulty in Algeria — drew the lessons of those defeats and was forced to grant our country its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This was greeted positively by our people, who had not been indifferent to this question but had instead developed appropriate resistance struggles. The decision by French colonial imperialism to cut its losses was a victory for our people over the forces of foreign oppression and exploitation. From the masses' point of view, it was a democratic reform, while from that of imperialism it was a change in the forms of domination and exploitation of our people.

This change nevertheless resulted in a realignment of classes and social layers and the formation of new classes. In alliance with the backward forces of traditional society, and in total contempt of the masses, whom they had used as a springboard to power, the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia of that time set about laying the political and economic foundations for new forms of imperialist domination and exploitation. Fear that the struggle of the popular masses would become more radical and lead to a genuine revolutionary solution was the basis for the choice made by imperialism. Henceforth, it would maintain its stranglehold over our country and perpetuate the exploitation of our people through national intermediaries. Voltaic nationals were to take over as agents for foreign domination and exploitation. The entire process of organizing neocolonial society would be nothing more than a simple operation of substituting one form for another.

In essence, neocolonial society and colonial society differed not at all. The colonial administration was replaced by a neocolonial administration identical to it in every respect. The colonial army was replaced by a neocolonial army with the same characteristics, the same functions, and the same role of safeguarding the interests of imperialism and its national allies. The colonial school system was replaced by neocolonial schools, which pursued the same goals of alienating our children from our country and reproducing a society that would primarily serve the interests of imperialism and secondarily those of its local lackeys and allies.

With the support and blessing of imperialism, Voltaic nationals set about organizing the systematic plunder of our country. With the crumbs of this pillage that fell to them, they were transformed, little by little, into a truly parasitic bourgeoisie that could no longer control its voracious appetite. Driven solely by personal interest, they no longer hesitated at even the most dishonest means, engaging in massive corruption, embezzlement of public funds and properties, influence-peddling and real estate speculation, and practicing favoritism and nepotism.

This is what accounts for all the material and financial wealth they accumulated from the sweat of the toilers. Not content to live off the fabulous incomes derived from the shameless exploitation of their ill-gotten wealth, they fought tooth and nail to capture political posts that would allow them to use the state apparatus to further their exploitation and underhanded dealings.

Hardly a year passed without them treating themselves to extravagant vacations abroad. Their children deserted the country's schools for prestigious educations in other countries. All the resources of the state were mobilized to guarantee them, at the slightest illness, expensive care in luxury hospitals in foreign countries.

All this has unfolded in full view of the honest, courageous, and hardworking Voltaic people, a people mired nonetheless in the most squalid misery. While Upper Volta is a paradise for the wealthy minority, it is a barely tolerable hell for the majority, the people.

As part of this big majority, the wage earners, despite the fact that they are assured a regular income, suffer the constraints and pitfalls of capitalist consumer society. Their income is completely consumed before they have even touched it. This vicious cycle goes on and on with no perspective of being broken.

Through their respective trade unions, the wage earners engage in struggles to improve their living conditions. Sometimes the scope of those struggles forces concessions from the neocolonial authorities.

But they simply give with one hand what they take back with the other.

Thus a 10 percent wage increase is announced with great fanfare, only to be immediately taxed, wiping out the expected beneficial effects of the first measure. After five, six, or seven months, the workers finally understand the swindle and mobilize for new struggles. Seven months is more than enough for the reactionaries in power to catch their breath and devise new schemes. Thus, in this endless fight, the worker always comes out the loser.

The peasants, the “wretched of the earth,” are also a component of this big majority. These peasants are expropriated, robbed, molested, imprisoned, ridiculed, and humiliated every day, yet they are the ones whose labor creates wealth. The country’s economy stays afloat despite its weakness thanks to their productive labor. It is from this labor that all those nationals for whom Upper Volta is an El Dorado sweeten their lives. Yet it is the peasants who suffer most from the lack of buildings, roads, health facilities, and services. These peasants, creators of national wealth, are the ones who suffer the most from the lack of schools and educational materials for their children. It is their children who will swell the ranks of the unemployed after a brief stint in classrooms poorly adapted to the realities of this country. It is among the peasants that the illiteracy rate is the highest — 98 percent. Those who most need to learn, so that the output of their productive labor can increase, are the very ones who benefit the least from expenditures for health care, education, and technology.

The peasant youth — who have the same attitudes as all youth, greater sensitivity to social injustice, and greater desire for progress — finally leave the countryside in revolt, thus depriving it of its most dynamic elements.

Their initial impulse drives these youth to the large urban centers, Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso. There they hope to find better-paying jobs and to benefit from the advantages of progress. The lack of jobs pushes them to idleness, with all its characteristic vices. Finally, so as not to end up in prison, they seek salvation by going abroad, where the most shameless humiliation and exploitation await them. But does Voltaic society leave them any other choice?

Stated most succinctly, this is the situation in our country after twenty-three years of neocolonialism: a paradise for some and hell for the rest.

After twenty-three years of imperialist domination and exploitation, our country remains a backward agricultural country where the

rural sector — 90 percent of the active population — accounts for only 45 percent of our gross domestic product and furnishes 95 percent of the country's total exports.

More simply, it should be noted that in other countries farmers constituting less than 5 percent of the population manage not only to feed themselves adequately and satisfy the basic needs of the entire nation, but also to export enormous quantities of their agricultural produce. Here, however, despite strenuous exertions, more than 90 percent of the population experiences famine and want and, along with the rest of the population, is obliged to fall back on imported agricultural products and even international aid. In addition, the imbalance between exports and imports helps accentuate the country's dependence on others. As a result, the trade deficit grows considerably over the years and the value of our exports covers only about 25 percent of imports.

To state it more clearly, we buy more from abroad than we sell. An economy that functions on such a basis is headed for increasing ruin and catastrophe. Private investments coming in from abroad are not only insufficient, but eat enormous holes in our country's economy and thus contribute nothing toward increasing its ability to accumulate. An important portion of the wealth created through foreign investments is siphoned off abroad, instead of being reinvested to increase the country's productive capacity. In the 1973-79 period, it is estimated that 1.7 billion CFA francs left the country each year as income from direct foreign investments, while new investments accounted only for an average of 1.3 billion CFA francs a year.

This insufficient investment in production has impelled the Voltaic state to play a fundamental role in the national economy to supplement private investment. This is a difficult situation, considering that the state's budgetary income is basically composed of tax revenues. These represent 85 percent of total revenues and largely come from import duties and taxes. In addition to financing national investment, this income finances state expenditures, 70 percent of which go to pay the salaries of government employees and to ensure the functioning of administrative services. What, then, can possibly be left for social and cultural investments?

In the realm of education, our country is among the most backward, with 16.4 percent of our children attending school and an illiteracy rate that reaches an average of 92 percent. This means that barely 8 out of every 100 Voltaics know how to read and write in any language.

On the level of health, the rate of illness and mortality is among

the highest in the subregion because of the proliferation of communicable diseases and nutritional deficiencies. How can we possibly avoid such a catastrophic situation when there is only one hospital bed per 1,200 inhabitants and one doctor per 48,000 inhabitants?

These few elements alone are enough to illustrate the legacy bequeathed to us by twenty-three years of neocolonialism, twenty-three years of a policy of total national neglect.

No Voltaic who loves and honors his country can be indifferent to this situation, which is one of the most disheartening. Our people, our courageous, hardworking people, have never been able to tolerate such a situation. Knowing that it is a product not of fate, but of society being organized on an unjust basis for the sole benefit of a minority, the people have systematically struggled in many different ways, searching for the means to put an end to the old order of things.

This is why our people greeted with wild enthusiasm the National Council of the Revolution and the August revolution, the crowning point of the efforts and sacrifices they had made in order to overthrow the old order and install a new one capable of rehabilitating the Voltaic man and giving our country a choice place among the confederation of free, prosperous, and respected nations.

The parasitic classes that have always profited from a colonial and neocolonial Upper Volta are, and will continue to be, hostile to the transformations undertaken by the revolutionary process begun on August 4, 1983, because they are attached by an umbilical cord to international imperialism and will remain so. They are and remain fervent defenders of the privileges they have acquired through their allegiance to imperialism.

Regardless of what is said or done, they will remain true to themselves and will continue to plot and scheme with the goal of reconquering their "lost kingdom." It is pointless to expect that these nostalgic people will change their views and attitude. The only language they understand is the language of struggle, the struggle of the revolutionary classes against those who exploit and oppress the people. For them, our revolution will be the most authoritarian thing there is; it will be an act through which the people will impose their will by all available means, including arms if necessary.

Who are these enemies of the people?

They revealed themselves to the people by their viciousness toward the revolutionary forces during the May 17 events. The people have identified them in the heat of revolutionary battle. They are:

1. The Voltaic bourgeoisie, which can be broken down according

to the functions of its various sectors into the state, comprador, and middle bourgeoisie.

The state bourgeoisie: This is the sector known as the politico-bureaucratic bourgeoisie. It is a bourgeoisie that has used its political monopoly to enrich itself in an illicit and indecent manner, using the state apparatus just as an industrial capitalist uses the means of production to accumulate surplus value drawn from the exploitation of the workers' labor power. This sector of the bourgeoisie will never renounce its old advantages of its own accord and passively observe the ongoing revolutionary transformations.

The commercial bourgeoisie: This sector, by its very activity, is linked to imperialism by numerous ties. For this sector, the end of imperialist domination means the death of "the goose that lays the golden egg." That is why it will oppose the present revolution with all its might. From this category, for example, emerge those disreputable merchants who try to starve the people by withdrawing supplies from the market in order better to pursue their speculation and economic sabotage.

The middle bourgeoisie: This sector of the Voltaic bourgeoisie, although it has ties with imperialism, competes with it for control of the market. But since it is economically weaker, it is pushed aside by imperialism. It therefore has grievances against imperialism but also fears the people, and this fear may lead it to make a bloc with imperialism. Nevertheless, because the domination of our country by imperialism prevents this sector from playing its real role as a national bourgeoisie, some of its elements could, under certain circumstances, be favorable to the revolution. This would place them objectively on the side of the people. However, we must cultivate among the people a revolutionary mistrust of such elements who move toward the revolution, since all kinds of opportunists will rally to it under this cover.

2. The reactionary forces who base their power on the traditional, feudal-type structures of our society and who in their majority were able to put up staunch resistance to French colonial imperialism. But since our country gained national sovereignty, they have joined forces with the reactionary bourgeoisie to oppress the Voltaic people. These forces have used the peasant masses as a reservoir of votes to be delivered to the highest bidder.

In order to preserve their interests, which they have in common with those of imperialism and which are opposed to those of the people, these reactionary forces most frequently rely on the decaying values of our traditional culture that still persist in rural areas. These

backward forces will oppose our revolution to the extent that it democratizes social relations in the countryside, increases the peasants' responsibilities, and brings them greater education and knowledge with which to achieve their own economic and cultural emancipation.

These are the enemies of the people in the present revolution, enemies identified by the people themselves during the May events. These are the forces that constituted the bulk of those who, isolated and protected by a cordon of soldiers, marched to demonstrate their class support for the already moribund regime that emerged from the reactionary and proimperialist [May 17] coup d'état. All those who are not part of the reactionary and antirevolutionary classes and social layers enumerated above are part of the Voltaic people, a people who consider imperialist domination and exploitation an abomination and who have continually demonstrated this through concrete daily struggles against the different neocolonial regimes.

The people, in the current revolution, are composed of:

1. The Voltaic working class, which is young and few in number, but which has proved through continuous struggle against the employers that it is a genuinely revolutionary class. In the current revolution, it is a class that has everything to gain and nothing to lose. It has no means of production to lose, it has no piece of property to defend within the framework of the old neocolonial society. To the contrary, it is convinced that the revolution is its own, because it will emerge from the revolution more numerous and stronger.

2. The petty bourgeoisie, which constitutes a vast social layer that is very unstable and that often vacillates between the cause of the popular masses and that of imperialism. In its great majority, it always ends up taking the side of the popular masses. It is composed of the most diverse elements, including small traders, petty-bourgeois intellectuals (government employees, students, private sector employees, and so on), and artisans.

3. The Voltaic peasantry, which is composed in its big majority of small peasants who, as a result of the ongoing disintegration of collective property forms since the introduction of the capitalist mode of production in our country, are attached to their small plots of land. Market relations have increasingly dissolved communal bonds and replaced them with private property in the means of production. In the new situation thus created by the penetration of capitalism into our countryside, the Voltaic peasant, tied to small-scale production, embodies bourgeois productive relations. From this perspective, the Voltaic peasantry is also an integral part of the petty-

bourgeois layer of the population.

Because of its past and present situation, it is the social layer that has had to pay the highest price for imperialist domination and exploitation. The economic and cultural backwardness that characterizes our countryside has kept it isolated from the main currents of progress and modernization, relegating it to the role of a reservoir for reactionary political parties. Nevertheless, the peasantry has a stake in the revolution and, in terms of numbers, is its principal force.

4. The lumpenproletariat, a layer of declassed elements who, since they are without work, are inclined to hire themselves out to reactionary and counterrevolutionary forces to carry out the latter's dirty work. To the extent that the revolution can win them over by giving them something useful to do, they can become its fervent defenders.

The character and scope of the August revolution

The revolutions that take place around the world are not all alike. Each revolution has its own originality, which distinguishes it from the others. Our revolution, the August revolution, is no exception. It takes into account the special features of our country, its level of development, and its subjugation by the world imperialist capitalist system.

Our revolution is a revolution that is unfolding in a backward, agricultural country where the weight of tradition and ideology emanating from a feudal-type social organization weighs very heavily on the popular masses. It is a revolution in a country that, because of the oppression and exploitation of our people by imperialism, has evolved from a colony into a neocolony. It is a revolution occurring in a country still lacking an organized working class, conscious of its historic mission, and therefore not possessing any tradition of revolutionary struggle. It is a revolution taking place in one of the continent's small countries, at a time when the revolutionary movement on the international level is increasingly coming apart and there is no visible hope of seeing forged a homogenous bloc capable of encouraging and giving practical support to nascent revolutionary movements. All these historical, geographic, and sociological circumstances stamp our revolution with a certain, specific imprint.

The August revolution has a dual character: It is a democratic and popular revolution. Its primary tasks are to liquidate imperialist domination and exploitation and cleanse the countryside of all social, economic, and cultural obstacles that keep it in a backward state. From this flows its democratic character.

Its popular character arises from the full participation of the Voltaic masses in the revolution and their consistent mobilization around democratic and revolutionary slogans that express in concrete terms their own interests as opposed to those of the reactionary classes allied with imperialism. The popular character of the August revolution also lies in the fact that, in place of the old state machinery, a new machinery is being constructed that will guarantee the democratic exercise of power by the people and for the people.

Our current revolution as characterized above, while it is an anti-imperialist revolution, is nevertheless unfolding within the framework of the limits of a bourgeois economic and social order. In developing an analysis of the social classes in Voltaic society, we have put forward the idea that the Voltaic bourgeoisie is not a single, homogenous, reactionary, and antirevolutionary mass. In fact, what characterizes the bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries, under capitalist relations, is its congenital inability to revolutionize society as the bourgeoisie of Europe did in the 1780s, that is, in the epoch when the bourgeoisie was still an ascending class.

These are the characteristics and limitations of the present revolution unleashed in Upper Volta beginning August 4, 1983. Having a clear view and precise definition of its content arms us against the danger of deviation and excess that could be detrimental to our revolution's advance to victory. All those who have taken up the defense of the August revolution should assimilate the guiding perspective developed here, so as to be able to assume their role as conscious revolutionaries, real propagandists who, fearlessly and tirelessly, disseminate this perspective to the masses.

It is no longer enough to call ourselves revolutionary. We must also grasp the profound meaning of the revolution that we are fervently defending. This is the best way to guard it from the attacks and distortions that the counterrevolutionaries are certain to use against it. Knowing how to link revolutionary theory to revolutionary practice will now be the decisive criterion in distinguishing consistent revolutionaries from all those who flock to the revolution for motives foreign to the revolutionary cause.

The people's sovereignty in the exercise of revolutionary power

As we have said, one of the distinctive traits of the August revolution, which gives it its popular character, is that it is a movement of the immense majority for the benefit of the immense majority. It is a revolution made by the Voltaic popular masses themselves, with

their own slogans and aspirations. The goal of this revolution is for the people to assume power. That is why the first act of the revolution, following the August 4 proclamation, was an appeal to the people to create Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). The National Council of the Revolution is convinced that for this revolution to be a genuinely popular revolution it must lead to the destruction of the neocolonial state machinery and the organization of a new machinery capable of guaranteeing the people's sovereignty. The question of how this popular power will be exercised, how this power should be organized, is an essential question for the future of our revolution.

The history of our country up to today has been dominated essentially by the exploiting and conservative classes, which have exercised their antidemocratic and antipopular dictatorship through their hold on politics, the economy, ideology, culture, administration, and justice.

The revolution has as its primary objective the transfer of power from the hands of the Voltaic bourgeoisie allied with imperialism into the hands of the alliance of popular classes that make up the people. This means that the people in power must henceforth counterpose their own democratic and popular power to the antidemocratic and antipopular dictatorship of the reactionary alliance of social classes that favor imperialism.

This democratic and popular power will be the foundation, the solid base, of revolutionary power in Upper Volta. Its supreme task will be the total reconversion of the entire state machinery, with its laws, administration, courts, police, and army, all of which are fashioned to serve and defend the selfish interests of the reactionary social classes and layers. Its task will be to organize the struggle against counterrevolutionary attempts to reconquer "Paradise Lost," with the goal of completely crushing the resistance of reactionaries who are nostalgic for the past. From this flows the need for the CDRs and their specific role as the popular masses' beachhead from which to storm the citadels of reaction and counterrevolution.

For a correct understanding of the nature, role, and functioning of the CDRs

Building a popular democratic state, the ultimate goal of the August revolution, cannot and will not be done in a day. It is an arduous task that will demand enormous sacrifices of us. The democratic character of this revolution requires that we decentralize administra-

tive power and bring the administration closer to the people, so as to make public affairs a concern of everyone. In this immense and long-term endeavor, we have undertaken to revise the administrative map of the country to make it much more efficient. We have also undertaken to renew the management of our administrative services in a more revolutionary direction. At the same time, we have dismissed government officials and officers who, for various reasons, cannot keep pace with the revolution today. We are aware that much still remains to be done.

Within the revolutionary process that began on August 4, the National Council of the Revolution is the power that plans, leads, and oversees national political, economic, and social life. It must have local bodies in the various sectors of national life. Therein lies the essential significance of the creation of the CDRs, which are the representatives of revolutionary power in the villages, the urban neighborhoods, and the workplaces.

The CDRs are the authentic organization of the people for wielding revolutionary power. They are the instrument the people have forged in order to take genuine command of their destiny and thereby extend their control into all areas of society. The people's arms, the people's power, the people's riches — it will be the people who will manage them. The CDRs exist for this purpose.

Their functions are enormous and varied. Their main task is to organize the Voltaic people as a whole and draw them into the revolutionary struggle. Organized into CDRs, the people acquire not only the right to review the problems of their development, but also to participate in making decisions and carrying them out. The revolution, as a correct theory for the destruction of the old order and the construction of a new type of society in its place, can be led only by those who have a stake in it.

The CDRs are the shock troops that will attack all the strongholds of resistance. They are the builders of a revolutionary Upper Volta. They are the yeast that must carry the revolution to all of our provinces and villages, into all public and private services, homes, and milieus. In order to do that, the revolutionary members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution must energetically outdo each other in the following basic tasks:

1. Action directed toward CDR members. It is up to revolutionaries to work to politically educate their comrades. The CDRs must be schools of political training. The CDRs are the appropriate framework in which comrades discuss the decisions of the higher bodies of the revolution: the CNR and the government.

2. Action directed toward the popular masses, aimed at getting them to massively support the CNR's objectives through bold and constant propaganda and agitation. The CDRs must be able to counter the propaganda and lying slanders of the reactionaries with appropriate revolutionary propaganda and explanations, based on the principle that only the truth is revolutionary.

The CDRs must listen to the masses so that they understand their moods and needs and can inform the CNR of them in a timely way and make the appropriate concrete proposals. They are urged to think through questions concerning the improvement of the masses' situation by supporting initiatives taken by the latter.

It is vitally necessary that the CDRs maintain direct contact with the popular masses by organizing periodic public meetings at which questions concerning their interests are discussed. This is essential if the CDRs wish to help to apply the CNR's directives correctly. Thus, the CNR's decisions will be explained to the masses through propaganda work, as will all measures aimed at improving their living conditions. The CDRs must fight alongside the popular masses of the cities and countryside against their enemies, against the adversities of nature, and for the transformation of their material and intellectual existence.

3. The CDRs must work in a rational manner, thereby illustrating one of the traits of our revolution — its rigor. They should therefore adopt coherent and ambitious plans of action to be followed by all members.

Since August 4 — a date that has already become a historic one for our people — Voltairics have taken initiatives to equip themselves with Committees for the Defense of the Revolution in response to the CNR's call. CDRs are thus being established in the villages, in the urban neighborhoods, and will soon be set up in the workplaces, in the public services, in the factories, and within the army. All this is the result of spontaneous action by the masses. We must now structure them on a clear basis and organize them on a national scale. The National General Secretariat of the CDRs is now setting about this task. The work of thinking this through on the basis of already acquired experience is currently under way. Until this produces definitive results, we will limit ourselves to giving an outline of the general guiding principles of the functioning of the CDRs.

The main idea behind the creation of the CDRs is to democratize power. The CDRs will become the organs through which the people exercise local power derived from the central power, which is vested in the National Council of the Revolution.

The CNR is the supreme power, except during sessions of the national congress. It is the leading organ of this entire structure, which is guided by the principle of democratic centralism.

On the one hand, democratic centralism is based on the subordination of lower organs to higher ones, of which the CNR is the highest and to which all the organizations are subordinate. On the other hand, this centralism remains democratic, since the principle of elections applies at all levels, and the autonomy of the local organs is recognized regarding all questions under their jurisdiction, within the limits and according to the general directives drawn up by the higher body.

Revolutionary morality within the CDRs

The revolution aims to transform all economic, social, and cultural relations in society. It aims to create a new Voltaic man, with an exemplary morality and social behavior that inspires the admiration and confidence of the masses. Neocolonial domination reduced our society to such degradation that it will take us years to cleanse it. In the meantime, CDR members must develop a new consciousness and a new behavior, with the aim of setting a good example for the masses. While carrying out the revolution, we must pay attention to our own qualitative transformation. Without a qualitative transformation of those who are considered to be the architects of the revolution, it is practically impossible to create a new society free from corruption, theft, lies, and individualism in general.

We must make every effort to see that our actions live up to our words and be vigilant with regard to our social behavior so as not to lay ourselves open to attack by counterrevolutionaries lying in wait. If we always keep in mind that the interests of the masses take precedence over personal interests, then we will avoid going off course.

The activities of certain CDR members who harbor the counter-revolutionary dream of amassing property and profits through the CDRs must be denounced and combated. We must do away with the prima donna mentality. The sooner these inadequacies are combated, the better for the revolution.

From our point of view, a revolutionary is someone who knows how to be modest, while at the same time being the most determined in carrying out the tasks entrusted to him. He fulfills them without boasting and without expecting any reward.

We have noticed lately that certain elements who actively participated in the revolution — and who expected that this would entitle

them to privileged treatment, honors, and important positions — are venting their spleens by engaging in sabotage because they did not get what they wanted. This proves that they participated in the revolution without ever understanding its real objectives.

You do not make a revolution simply to take the place of the former rulers you have overthrown. You do not participate in the revolution for vindictive reasons, out of desire for an advantageous position: “Get out of my way so that I can take your place!” This kind of motive is foreign to the ideals of the August revolution. Those who act in such a way demonstrate their weakness as petty-bourgeois careerists, if not dangerous counterrevolutionary opportunists.

The image of a revolutionary that the CNR strives to impress on everyone’s consciousness is that of an activist who is one with the masses, who has faith in them, and who respects them, someone who has freed himself from any attitudes of contempt toward them, someone who does not think of himself as a schoolmaster to whom the masses owe obedience and submission. To the contrary, he goes to their school, listens to them attentively, and pays attention to their opinions. He renounces all authoritarian methods worthy of reactionary bureaucrats.

The revolution is different from destructive anarchy. It demands discipline and exemplary conduct. Vandalism and adventurist actions of all sorts, rather than strengthening the revolution by winning the masses’ support, weaken it and repel a large part of the masses. This is why CDR members should deepen their sense of responsibility toward the people and seek to inspire respect and admiration.

Weaknesses along these lines most often reflect ignorance concerning the character and objectives of the revolution. In order for us to guard against them, we must immerse ourselves in the study of revolutionary theory. Theoretical study deepens our understanding of developments, clarifies our actions, and forewarns us against being presumptuous on many things. We should henceforth give special importance to this aspect of the question and strive to set an example that inspires others to follow us.

For revolutionizing all sectors of Voltaic society

All of the former political regimes sought to introduce measures to improve the management of neocolonial society. The changes introduced by the various regimes amounted to installing new teams within the framework of neocolonial power. None of these regimes wished to or was able to challenge the socioeconomic foundations of

Voltaic society. That is why they all failed.

The August revolution does not seek to install just one more regime in Upper Volta. It represents a break with all previously known regimes. Its ultimate goal is to build a new Voltaic society, in which the Voltaic citizen, motivated by revolutionary consciousness, will be the architect of his own happiness, a happiness equivalent to the energy he has expended.

In order to do this, the revolution — even though this may displease the conservative and backward forces — will be a deep and total upheaval that will not spare any domain, nor any sector of economic, social, and cultural activity. Revolutionizing all spheres and areas of activity is the slogan of the day. Strengthened by the guiding perspective laid out here, every citizen, at every level, should undertake to revolutionize his sector of activity.

As of now, the philosophy of revolutionary transformation will be applied in the following sectors: (1) the national army, (2) policies concerning women, and (3) economic development.

1. The national army's place in the democratic and popular revolution.

According to the tenets governing the defense of revolutionary Upper Volta, a conscious people cannot leave the defense of their homeland to one group of men, however competent they may be. Conscious people take charge of their homeland's defense themselves. Our armed forces thus constitute simply a detachment that is more specialized than the rest of the population with regard to the defense of Upper Volta's internal and external security. Similarly, even though the health of the Voltaic people is the business of the people as a whole and of each Voltaic individually, there exists and will continue to exist a more specialized medical corps that will devote more time to the question of public health.

The revolution prescribes three missions to the national armed forces:

1. To be prepared to combat all internal and external enemies and to participate in the military training of the rest of the people. This presupposes an increased operational capacity, making each soldier a competent fighter, unlike the old army, which was merely a mass of salaried individuals.

2. To participate in national production. In effect, the new soldier must live and suffer among the people to which he belongs. An army that simply eats up the budget is a thing of the past. From now on, besides handling arms, the army will work in the fields and raise cattle, sheep, and poultry. It will build schools and health clinics and ensure

their functioning. It will maintain roads and transport mail, the sick, and agricultural products by air between the regions.

3. Develop each soldier into a revolutionary cadre. The days are over when the army was declared neutral and apolitical, while in fact serving as a bastion of reaction and a guardian of imperialist interests. Gone forever are the days when our national army acted like a corps of foreign mercenaries in conquered territory. Armed with political and ideological training, our soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers who are engaged in the revolutionary process will no longer be criminals in power, but will become conscious revolutionaries, at home among the people like fish in water.

As an army at the service of the revolution, the People's National Army will have no place for any soldier who despises, looks down on, and brutalizes the people. An army of the people at the service of the people — such is the new army we are building in place of the neocolonial army, which was used to dominate the people as a veritable instrument of oppression and repression in the hands of the reactionary bourgeoisie. Such an army will be fundamentally different from the old army even in terms of its internal organization and its principles of functioning. Thus, in place of the blind obedience of soldiers toward their officers, of subordinates toward their superiors, a healthy discipline will be developed that, while strict, will be based on the conscious support of the men and the troops.

Contrary to the point of view of officers filled with the colonial spirit, the politicization and revolutionization of the army does not mean the end of discipline. Discipline within a politicized army will have a new content. It will be a revolutionary discipline, that is, a discipline that derives its strength from the fact that the officer and soldier, commissioned and noncommissioned personnel, are valued on the basis of human dignity and are distinguished from one another only by their concrete tasks and by their respective responsibilities. Strengthened with this understanding of relations between men, military officers should respect their men, love them, and treat them as equals.

Here as well, the CDRs have a fundamental role to play. CDR cadres within the army must be tireless pioneers in the building of the People's National Army of the democratic and popular state, whose essential tasks within the country will be to defend the rights and interests of the people, maintain revolutionary order, safeguard democratic and popular power, and, externally, to defend territorial integrity.

2. *Voltaic women's role in the democratic and popular revolution.*

The weight of the centuries-old traditions of our society has relegated women to the rank of beasts of burden. Women suffer doubly from all the scourges of neocolonial society. First, they experience the same suffering as men. Second, they are subjected to additional suffering by men.

Our revolution is in the interests of all the oppressed and all those who are exploited in today's society. It is therefore in the interests of women, since the basis of their domination by men lies in the way society's system of political and economic life is organized. By changing the social order that oppresses women, the revolution creates the conditions for their genuine emancipation.

The women and men of our society are all victims of imperialist oppression and domination. That is why they wage the same struggle. The revolution and women's liberation go together. We do not talk of women's emancipation as an act of charity or because of a surge of human compassion. It is a basic necessity for the triumph of the revolution. Women hold up the other half of the sky.

Forging a new mentality on the part of Voltaic women that allows them to take responsibility for the country's destiny alongside men is one of the primary tasks of the revolution. At the same time, it is necessary to transform men's attitudes toward women.

Up until now, women have been excluded from the realm of decision making. The revolution, by entrusting responsibilities to women, is creating the conditions for turning loose their fighting initiative. As part of its revolutionary policy, the CNR will work to mobilize, organize, and unite all the active forces of the nation, and women will not lag behind. Women will be an integral part of all the battles we will have to wage against the various shackles of neocolonial society and for the construction of a new society. They will take part in all levels of the organization of the life of the nation as a whole, from conceiving projects to making decisions and implementing them. The final goal of this great undertaking is to build a free and prosperous society in which women will be equal to men in all domains.

However, we need a correct understanding of the question of women's emancipation. It does not signify a mechanical equality between men and women. It does not mean acquiring habits similar to those of men, such as drinking, smoking, and wearing trousers. Nor will acquiring diplomas make women equal to men or more emancipated. A diploma is not a passport to emancipation.

The genuine emancipation of women is that which entrusts responsibilities to them and involves them in productive activity and in the

different struggles the people face. Women's genuine emancipation is one that exacts men's respect and consideration. Emancipation, like freedom, is not granted but conquered. It is for women themselves to put forward their demands and mobilize to win them.

For that, the democratic and popular revolution will create the necessary conditions to allow Voltaic women to realize themselves fully and completely. After all, would it be possible to eliminate the system of exploitation while maintaining the exploitation of women, who make up more than half our society?

3. An independent, self-sufficient, and planned national economy at the service of a democratic and popular society.

The process of revolutionary transformations undertaken since August 4 places on the agenda major democratic and popular reforms. The National Council of the Revolution is conscious that the construction of an independent, self-sufficient, and planned national economy will be attained through a radical transformation of the present society, a transformation that requires the following major reforms:

- Agrarian reform;
- Administrative reform;
- Educational reform;
- Reform of the structures of production and distribution in the modern sector.

The agrarian reform aims to:

- Increase labor productivity through better organization of the peasants and the introduction of modern agricultural techniques in the countryside;
- Develop a diversified agriculture, together with regional specialization;
- Abolish all the fetters that are part of the traditional socioeconomic structures oppressing the peasants;
- Finally, make agriculture the lever for industrial development.

All this is possible by giving real meaning to the slogan of self-sufficiency in food production, a slogan that seems antiquated now by dint of having been proclaimed without conviction. First of all, this will be a bitter struggle against nature, which is no more intractable for us than for other peoples who have so admirably conquered it in the sphere of agriculture. The CNR will harbor no illusions in gigantic, sophisticated projects. To the contrary, numerous small accomplishments in the agricultural system will allow us to transform our territory into one vast field, an endless series of farms. Second, it will be a struggle against those who starve the people, the agricul-

tural speculators and capitalists of all types. Finally, it will be protection against imperialist domination of our agriculture in terms of orientation, imperialism's plunder of our resources, and the unfair competition of its imports with our local products — imports whose only value is their packaging for bourgeois who crave the latest fads. Adequate producer prices and agroindustrial enterprises will assure the peasants of markets for their produce throughout all seasons.

The administrative reform aims at making the administration inherited from colonialism operational. In order to do that, it must be purged of all the evils that characterize it, namely, the unwieldy and interfering bureaucracy and all its consequences. We must proceed toward a complete revision of the civil service statutes. The reform must produce an administration that is inexpensive, more effective, and more flexible.

The educational reform aims to promote a new orientation for education and culture. It must lead to a transformation of school into a tool of the revolution. Graduates must not serve their own interests and those of the exploiting classes, but those of the popular masses. The revolutionary education taught in the new school must imbue everyone with a Voltaic ideology and personality that liberates them from learning by rote. One of the missions of schools in the democratic and popular society will be to teach students to critically and positively assimilate the ideas and experiences of other peoples.

To end illiteracy and obscurantism, emphasis must be placed on mobilizing all our energy to organize the masses so as to awaken and induce in them a thirst for learning by showing them the drawbacks of ignorance. Any policy of fighting against illiteracy that does not involve the participation of those most concerned is doomed to failure.

The culture of a democratic and popular society must have a triple character: national, revolutionary, and popular. Everything that is antinational, antirevolutionary, and antipopular must be banished. Instead, our culture will be enhanced, extolling as it does dignity, courage, nationalism, and the great human virtues. The democratic and popular revolution will create favorable conditions for the blossoming of a new culture. Our artists will have a free hand to go forward boldly. They should seize the opportunity before them to raise our culture to a world level. Let writers put their pens at the service of the revolution! Let musicians sing not only of our people's glorious past, but also of their bright and promising future!

The revolution expects our artists to be able to describe reality, portray it in living images, and express it in melodious notes while at

the same time showing our people the correct way forward to a better future. It expects them to place their creative genius at the service of a Voltaic, national, revolutionary, and popular culture.

We must be able to take from our past — from our traditions — all that is good, as well as all that is positive in foreign cultures, so as to give a new dimension to our culture. The inexhaustible fountainhead of the masses' creative inspiration lies in the popular masses themselves. Knowing how to live with the masses, being involved in the people's movement, sharing the joys and sufferings of the people, and working and living with them — all this should be the major preoccupation for our artists. Before producing, we should ask: for whom is our creation intended? If we are convinced that we are creating for the people, then we must understand clearly who they are, what their different components are, and what their deepest aspirations are.

The reform of our national economy's structures of production and distribution aims to progressively establish effective control by the Voltaic people over the channels of production and distribution. For without genuine mastery over these channels, it is impossible in practice to build an independent economy that serves the interests of the people.

People of Upper Volta!

Comrades, cadres of the revolution!

The needs of our people are enormous. Satisfaction of these needs requires that revolutionary transformations be undertaken in all spheres.

In the field of health care and social assistance for the popular masses, the objectives to be reached can be summed up as:

- Making health care available to everyone;
- Initiating maternal and infant assistance and care;
- Launching an immunization policy against communicable diseases through an increase in vaccination campaigns;
- Making the masses aware of the need to acquire good hygiene habits.

None of these objectives can be attained without the conscious involvement of the popular masses themselves in the struggle, under the revolutionary guidance of the health services.

In the field of housing, a field of crucial importance, we must undertake a vigorous policy to end real estate speculation and the exploitation of the workers through excessive rents. Important measures in this field must be taken to:

- Establish reasonable rents;

- Rapidly divide neighborhoods into lots;
- Construct sufficient modern residential housing on a massive scale, accessible to the workers.

One of the essential concerns of the National Council of the Revolution is to unite the different nationalities that comprise Upper Volta in the common struggle against the enemies of our revolution. There are in fact in our country a multitude of ethnic groups distinguished from each other by language and custom. The totality of these nationalities forms the Voltaic nation. Imperialism, through its policy of divide and rule, did its utmost to exacerbate the contradictions among them, to set one against the other. The CNR's policy aims to unite these different nationalities so that they can live in equality and enjoy equal opportunity for success. In order to do that, special emphasis will be placed on:

- Promoting the economic development of the different regions;
- Encouraging economic exchange among them;
- Combating prejudices among the ethnic groups, resolving the differences among them in a spirit of unity;
- Punishing those who instigate divisions.

In view of all the problems that our country faces, the revolution looms as a challenge that we must meet, motivated by the will to victory, through the effective participation of the masses mobilized within the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

In the near future, with the drawing up of programs for the different sectors, all of Upper Volta will become a vast construction site — a place where the cooperation of all Voltaics able and old enough to work will be needed for the merciless struggle we will wage to transform this country into a prosperous and radiant country, a country where the people are the only masters of the material and spiritual wealth of the nation.

Finally, we must define the place of the Voltaic revolution in the world revolutionary process. Our revolution is an integral part of the world movement for peace and democracy against imperialism and all kinds of hegemonism. That is why we will strive to establish diplomatic relations with countries, regardless of their political and economic systems, on the basis of the following principles:

- Respect for each other's independence, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty;
- Mutual nonaggression;
- Noninterference in internal affairs;
- Trade with all countries on an equal footing and on the basis of reciprocal benefits.

Our militant solidarity and support will go to national liberation movements fighting for the independence of their countries and the liberation of their peoples. This support will be directed in particular to:

- The people of Namibia under the leadership of the South West Africa People's Organisation;
- The Sahraoui people in their struggle to recover their national territory;
- The Palestinian people struggling for their national rights.

In our struggle, the anti-imperialist African countries are our objective allies. Rapprochement with these countries is necessary because of the neocolonial groupings that operate on our continent.

Long live the democratic and popular revolution!

Long live the National Council of the Revolution!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Notes

1. See the chronology for descriptions of these events.

The People's Revolutionary Courts

January 3, 1984

On January 3, 1984, Sankara delivered the opening speech at the first session of the People's Revolutionary Courts, held at the House of the People in Ouagadougou. The proceedings were broadcast live on national radio. On trial was former President Sangoulé Lamizana, overthrown in a 1980 military coup, who was accused of misappropriating public funds. Lamizana was eventually found not guilty. The following is translated from a pamphlet published by the Ministry of Justice.

Comrades, presidents of institutions;
Comrades, members of the National Council of the Revolution;
Comrades, members of the revolutionary government;
Comrades, members of the People's Revolutionary Courts;
Comrades, cadres of the democratic and popular revolution;
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

It was exactly eighteen years ago to the day that the Voltaic people took to the streets in a revolutionary tide, shouting slogans such as "Down with the embezzlers of public funds!" and "Down with those who starve the people!" at those who had perpetually gagged, exploited, and oppressed them. Eighteen years ago today the Voltaic people took to the streets to demand "bread, water, and democracy."

On January 3, 1966, the Voltaic people surged forward as one to place the reactionary and corrupt bourgeoisie of our country on trial — a bourgeoisie that, after using the people as a springboard to attain power, turned its backs on them in an unbridled race to accumulate ill-gotten wealth.

Today, the Voltaic people again accuse and demand that the people's verdict be imposed. Today, the Voltaic people have forged an appropriate instrument, the People's Revolutionary Courts, capable of achieving their most profound and long-standing aspirations. We have made our choice. From this moment on, nothing can prevent

the people from rendering their verdict. From this moment on, nothing will be able to prevent the people from meting out exemplary punishment to all the political scum who have fed off the famine and the villains who have treated the people with contempt and humiliated them with a thousand and one indignities.

The Voltaic people accuse and the world trembles.

The world of the exploiters, pillagers, and all those who have profited from the neocolonial system is trembling because the Voltaic people have now become masters of their destiny and will have justice.

Comrades, members of the People's Revolutionary Courts, in choosing January 3 as the date for the solemn opening of your deliberations, you are simply reestablishing the link with a recent past, with a decisive moment in the development of the people's conscious opposition to domination and exploitation by reactionary social layers, classes, and by real supporters of imperialism here at home.

The justification for setting up the People's Revolutionary Courts lies in the fact that the Voltaic people intend to replace the traditional courts and put into practice the principle of genuine participation by the toiling and exploited classes in the administration and management of state affairs in all spheres and sectors of society.

The judges of the People's Revolutionary Courts have been chosen from among the toilers and from among them only. Their mission is to apply the will of the people. For this, they have no need to know the old laws. Since they come from among the people, it is sufficient for them to let themselves be guided by their feel for popular justice.

In the absence of codified texts, they should base themselves on revolutionary law, rejecting the laws of neocolonial society. In establishing as its goal the destruction of the bureaucratic state apparatus, and in making it much easier for the people to find representation, our revolution, the August revolution, proves — if proof were still necessary — that the regime established by it is more democratic than the most democratic of bourgeois republics.

Despite this, we should expect that the establishment of our People's Revolutionary Courts will be the object of attack by enemies inside and outside the country, who, without a shadow of a doubt, will see in them an instrument of repression and political inquisition.

No doubt these people will shout about contempt for the rights of man. But this will not hold up. Our popular justice is a justice distinct from that of a society where the exploiters and oppressors control the state apparatus, in that it will publicly bring to light and expose the entire hidden social and political side of the crimes perpetrated

against the people, helping them to understand the consequences of these crimes, so that lessons can be drawn with regard to social morality and political practice. The judgments of the People's Revolutionary Courts will allow us to lay bare the sores of the neocolonial regime for all the world to see, providing material for criticism and laying out the elements of the construction of a new society.

In addition, by condemning social, economic, and moral infamies, we conduct a political trial, putting into question the political system of neocolonial society. Through the individual, society as a whole comes into question. This is why the discussion throughout the course of the trial should take on an educational character in its explanations given to those observing and in the press. Verdicts rendered should give us plenty to think about. Reactionary bourgeois morality hypocritically goes into fits of indignation over the condemnation of a few individuals, while remaining silent in its complicity with the wholesale genocide of a people dying of impoverishment, starvation, and obscurantism. We judge one man in order to establish the rights of millions. Thus, we are fervent defenders of the rights of man and not the rights of one man. To the immoral "morality" of the exploiting and corrupt minority, we counterpose the revolutionary morality of an entire people in favor of social justice.

Confident of this revolutionary legitimacy, the National Council of the Revolution (CNR) urges you, comrade judges of the People's Revolutionary Courts, to demonstrate coolheadedness and revolutionary consciousness; to act without excess, but firmly; with clarity of thought and not emotion; and with sound judgment but not leniency, so as to safeguard the gains of our revolution.

We have chosen between two forms of law: the revolutionary law of the people on the one hand, and the former reactionary law of the bourgeois minority on the other. The justice you are called upon to render is inspired by the democratic principles of our revolution. Democracy for the people and against those who exploit and oppress — such is the foundation for the work of the People's Revolutionary Courts.

You should be proud — proud to have been chosen and called on to be the architects of an undertaking that is innovative from all points of view.

Let us leave those who subscribe to so-called pure democracy to their whining and procrastination. Let the jurists and other scholars — formalists obsessed by procedures and protocol — be indignant and scandalized. They have not even understood that all this is aimed at bamboozling the people, turning the magistrate, draped in his

robe, decked out in his cloak, and often even a wig, into a clown for whom revolutionaries feel compassion, especially when we feel him drawing close to the people to the point of wanting to abandon his profession.

Reactionary regimes dispense reactionary justice. We understand the distress of a progressive or revolutionary magistrate when forced to apply laws that make a mockery of his innermost political convictions. We have observed the same dilemma in other professions — in the army, to cite just one example. But fortunately the revolution of August 4, the democratic and popular revolution, has liberated and set in motion the awareness of all those who have consciously chosen to side with the people.

The people of Upper Volta ceased being the dupes of reactionary politicians the day they understood that in a society where exploiters impose their domination on the majority of the people, justice unquestionably means justice for the exploiters. Since our revolution has as one of its objectives the institution of a democratic state, such a state must be fundamentally different from that of a state of exploiters.

Justice in a democratic state must therefore also be different from the justice of the exploiters. If the reactionary political regimes buried here, and those like them fossilizing elsewhere, never dared to put political mobsterism on trial and dare not do so today, it is precisely because they have understood the impossibility under their reactionary system of instituting a People's Revolutionary Court and allowing the people to speak out without themselves being swept aside. In the same way, they could not even do so with the traditional courts, whose verdicts could only provoke the legitimate wrath of the voiceless, the voice of the people.

This was the reason for the permanently awkward aspect of the administrative detentions, for example, carried out by the philistines of the Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress under the learned tutelage of the reactionary inventor-historian-inquisitionist, Joseph Ki-Zerbo.

Elsewhere, we see life imprisonment and permanent house arrest, all counting on the passage of time to make us forget that the leaders are faced with a political problem that they must solve: the people and their right to justice.

In setting up the People's Revolutionary Courts, the CNR, the revolutionary government, and the fighting people of the democratic and popular revolution know that popular justice must be ruthless and rigorous with regard to corrupt elements that are uncovered even

in our very ranks. At the same time, every cadre knows that his political work, his daily conduct, and his social activity will be so visible that he cannot allow himself to do by night — or in the shadows — anything different from what he can do in broad daylight with a clear conscience. In reality, there is no virtue other than the virtue imposed by, and genuinely under the control of, society and the people.

In a society such as ours, where the population is 95 percent illiterate and maintained in obscurantism and ignorance by the ruling classes, bourgeois law, in defiance of all common sense, dares to assert that “ignorance of the law is no excuse.” Such are the devices used by the idle ruling classes to oppress the broad popular masses, both the peasants of our countryside and the workers of our towns.

Likewise, in the name of this same law, it is asserted that “the law alone may employ force” — the law having been decreed in order to defend and safeguard the interests of the dominant classes. This argument concerning force was dredged up every time the interests of the minority were threatened. “The law alone may employ force” was hallowed by the expropriators in order to rule out any idea of popular justice.

Thus, anything is permissible, except for those without the money to buy the services of lawyers or magistrates when they and they alone are responsible for interpreting in their esoteric and elitist language consciously confused texts.

Ultimately, and for all intents and purposes, the law does employ force. The law of the richest, of the highest bidder, the oratorical talent sold to the highest bidder, always overrides the rights of the people, who remain ever guilty of being poor, of being unable to buy the services of renowned lawyers, or who are simply ignorant and illiterate.

Every day, under our very noses, we see thieves pursued by a crowd taking refuge in a police station, convinced that “the law alone may employ force,” and that they will be assured of protection. By contrast, however, a peasant passing through Ouagadougou, facing charges for the least trifle, must give the slip to both the prosecutor and police chief, since there is no hope of justice for him anywhere in the world of the big city. He believes the police station to be a place where he will be punished in the name of the law. He also believes — naively — that all citizens are equal before this immutable and uncircumventable law.

The democratic and popular revolution owes it to itself to demolish this antidemocratic and antipopular justice — just as our people demolished the results of the rigged elections of December 1965,

by which the reactionary megalomaniac Maurice Yaméogo claimed to have “democratically” won 99.99 percent of the votes. A few days later, on January 3, 1966, our people imposed its own implacable, revolutionary verdict outside the framework of the ballot box and in opposition to the ballots, deposing the impostor. No interpreter of Roman texts, no magistrate or lawyer, no court dared to put itself in the way of this powerful and implacable democracy — a truly popular democracy. And for good reason!

More recently, after the counterrevolutionary coup of May 17, 1983, when Comrade Blaise Compaoré returned to his troops and the revolutionary people of Pô in order to prepare the revolutionary counterattack against the usurpers, no one dared challenge the legitimacy of this attitude. It was clear that this challenged the military regulations, codes, and laws of the neocolonial army. Comrade Compaoré knew that his commandos and the people of Pô truly personified the most profound feelings of justice, honor, and dignity of our entire people. From this point of view, his action was democratic and legal a thousand times over. No military code or law of Voltaic neocolonial justice could approve such an attitude. Yet it was just and legitimate in the eyes of the vast majority of our revolutionary people, who had been held in contempt and humiliated by the reactionary betrayal of May 17, 1983. The manner in which our people have demonstrated their feelings in these two examples shows us that it serves no purpose to conform to the bourgeois legality of the minority if we are not in total harmony with the uncodified morality of our people.

The Voltaic people offer to share their experience with other peoples of the world. No arsenal of juridico-political combinations, no corrupt, feudal financial wizard, no guilt-tripping, and no electoralist circus will be able to prevent the justice of the people from triumphing.

Comrades, as long as oppression and exploitation exist, there will always be two justices and two democracies: that of the oppressors and that of the oppressed; that of the exploiters and that of the exploited. Justice under the democratic and popular revolution will always be justice for the oppressed and exploited against the neocolonial justice of yesterday, which was justice for the oppressors and exploiters. Comrades, the people must carry out justice themselves — their own justice.

The endless lamentations and crocodile tears must not influence us in any way when we are required to deal some hard blows against those who show they are incapable of any feelings other than the

most feudalistic contempt for the masses and their interests. However, if there are some who, having been punished severely and given the opportunity to understand their crimes, convince you of their gratitude toward the people, then hold out to them a saving hand.

Let them learn to know us. After having made them pay every last penny legitimately demanded from them by the people, we will create the conditions for them to understand that — stripped of their immense ill-gotten wealth — they will be able to find true happiness. In our revolutionary society, such happiness can be nothing other than honest labor for honest gain. This honest gain brings with it a dignity and freedom that cannot be calculated in terms of secret bank accounts in Switzerland or elsewhere, nor in terms of speculative stocks on the most respectable exchanges, nor in parading an assertive and traumatizing luxury before a people dying of hunger, disease, and ignorance. This happiness to which we invite those who may repent will reside in the satisfaction of having proven their usefulness to society and of participating in defining and realizing the aspirations of the people, who accept and integrate them.

Comrades, the People's Revolutionary Courts are sounding the death knell of Roman law; they are playing the swan song of the alien Napoleonic social law that has marginalized so very many of our people while declaring sacred the illegitimate and unjust privileges of a minority class. May the sessions soon to follow in Ouagadougou trace a radiant path at whose end, in the heavens of the world revolution, will shine the great sun of justice, whose powerful rays will bathe the hearts of all those who hope, but who do not dare; of those who dare, but who do not understand; and of all those who understand, but who do not dare.

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

There Is Only One Color — That of African Unity

August 1984

The following excerpts are from a news conference given by Sankara in August 1984 following celebrations marking the first anniversary of the revolution. Sankara had recently visited Ethiopia, Angola, the Congo, Mozambique, Gabon, and Madagascar. The excerpts are translated from Carrefour africain, August 10, 1984.

Question: What is the state of relations with your conservative, relatively more wealthy neighbor, the Ivory Coast?

Thomas Sankara: In what sense is the Ivory Coast conservative? I understood your question, but I'd like to know more precisely which aspect of its ideology makes it conservative in order to better judge the difference, if there is one, between our ideology and theirs.

Our relations are good, in that the Ivory Coast had relations with Upper Volta, and Burkina Faso¹ has stated clearly — as I said in my [first anniversary] message — that we would be open to relations with all nations and we would seek out all nations. In this spirit, I believe we have good relations with the Ivory Coast. Of course, there is always something that can be done to improve them. But we are in no way uncomfortable with the current situation. If our brothers in the Ivory Coast wish, we can continue this way and do even better. So I am not aware of any particular difficulties between the Ivory Coast and Burkina.

Of course, we have opponents in the Ivory Coast — many of them. But as revolutionaries we understand that whereas we became revolutionaries, the world we have to live with is not revolutionary, and we live with a reality that is not always to our liking. We must be prepared to live with regimes that are not making a revolution of any kind or that perhaps even attack our revolution.

This is a very big responsibility for revolutionaries. Maybe those of tomorrow will function in a better world and will have a much

easier task. But for us, anyway, as soon as we accept that the Ivory Coast is not making a revolution and that we are, everything becomes simple. The difficulty, complications, and concerns are mainly in the minds of the romantic brand of revolutionaries who hope or think that everyone should act like revolutionaries. For us there are no surprises. We are quite at ease with the situation. It's a reality we had prepared ourselves for.

Question: There are historic ties between Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. We can see that by the periodic visits you make as part of the different organizations in the region and the subregion. But concretely, Comrade President, since the National Council of the Revolution has come to power, what does the Abidjan-Ouagadougou axis look like? In addition, some talk of a certain coolness and point to the cancellation of your working visit to the Ivory Coast as proof. What is this all about?

Sankara: You ask what the Abidjan-Ouagadougou axis looks like! It looks like a straight line, serviced by Air Ivoire, Air Volta, soon to be Air Burkina; or a twisting, winding line, as shown by the Abidjan-Ouagadougou railway — a rather bumpy axis, very rough, with many ups and downs. The Abidjan-Ouaga route passes through dark regions, forests, and savannah that stretch from the ocean to the heart of the parched Sahel. Thus, it represents a combination of complex realities that each one of us must take into account. That's what the axis looks like, since you asked for a description.

On your second question. You say a coolness exists according to certain sources — you don't say according to whom, which doesn't facilitate my task — but that certain journals or people speak in one way or another of a certain coolness between Abidjan and Ouagadougou.

In Burkina we live in the warmth of the revolution, and those who are shivering can protect themselves as they wish and take the necessary precautions. The Ivory Coast and Burkina have all kinds of relations — geographic, historic, economic, social, and other. They are relations that cannot be made to disappear by sounding a gong. And the Ivory Coast cannot act as if they don't exist.

Today, Burkina Faso is embarked on a revolutionary road to transform its society, to fight against a certain number of ills and scourges that exist here, and we think that only Burkina's enemies are complaining. Every citizen of the Ivory Coast who loves the people of Burkina should applaud the revolution. Anyone who dislikes our rev-

olution does not love the Burkinabè people. This is where you must start in order to know where the cold is located and who is getting cold.

Does this mean that the Ivory Coast had excellent relations with reactionary Upper Volta and suddenly is getting cool because Upper Volta has become revolutionary? That's a question that can be answered only in the Ivory Coast. Burkina lives in the warmth of the revolution, warmth that we gladly share with anyone who is willing to accept it, but that we cannot impose on anyone. It would really be a shame if fraternal peoples, neighboring peoples, were not to share in or benefit from this same warmth.

Question: In contrast to the Ivory Coast, Ghana and its president are always welcome in Burkina Faso. We even saw troops [from Ghana] in the parade celebrating the revolution. Where does support end and interference begin? Or, in a word, could Ghana become a weight on your young country?

Sankara: Support to whom and interference in whose affairs? Interference begins when a people considers it has been betrayed. As long as this is not the case, the support can never be enough.

Ghana comes to Burkina Faso and demonstrates with us whenever it's called for, on happy and sometimes not so happy occasions. This is because — we have no doubts, and I'm sure you have no doubts either — the peoples of Ghana and Burkina Faso are kindred spirits. As long as this remains true, we can only deplore the fact that we have not done enough to increase the support.

We do not have a chauvinist view of things, and we condemn all sectarianism. This is why we consider borders to be merely administrative boundaries, necessary maybe, in order to limit each country's field of action and enable it to see things clearly enough. But the spirit of liberty and dignity, of counting on one's own resources, of independence, and of consistent anti-imperialist struggle — this spirit should blow from north to south and back again, crossing all borders with great gusto. We are happy to note that this is the case between Ghana and Burkina Faso and it should continue to be the case.

Do you think that our country would have any problems or difficulty at all, that our relations could not be improved with just about anybody, if this wind were to blow from our country to all others? Do you think that different countries would be threatening each other with the apocalypse today if this same wind were blowing among all the countries of the world? We could take the example of Iran and

Iraq today. Don't you think it would be good if Iranians could go and visit Iraqis as Ghanaians come to visit Burkina Faso and vice versa?

The example of Ghana and Burkina Faso is one that we would like to see multiplied many times over, and we think this would be in the interests of the different peoples. Those who feel endangered by this are perhaps those who would like to set Ghana against Burkina Faso for their own ulterior motives.

Question: What does Burkina Faso think of the current crisis within the Organization of African Unity (OAU)?

Sankara: We think that it's a completely normal crisis, one that is welcome, in fact, because it flows from a revolutionary process that necessitates reevaluating and redefining our aims.

The OAU could not continue to exist as it was. Unity-mongering has won out too easily over genuine concern for unity. Many things have been sacrificed in the name of unity and because of this unity-mongering. Today, the peoples of Africa are more and more demanding, and because of this they are saying no to meetings and conferences whose function is to adopt resolutions that are never acted on, or to prevent the adoption of resolutions that could be acted on and that people have been waiting for.

Africa is face to face with herself and her problems — problems the OAU had succeeded in skirting by putting them off to tomorrow. But this tomorrow is now today. We can no longer put all these questions off until tomorrow. This is why we find the OAU's crisis quite normal. It may even be a little late in coming.

Question: Could you tell us the position of Burkina Faso on the conflict in the Western Sahara?

Sankara: We have recognized the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). We think there can be no beating around the bush on this. When a people has chosen its organization, recognition is obligatory. In our opinion, there should be no OAU summit without the participation of the SADR. Should it be absent for some reason that is not legitimate, Burkina Faso will not lend itself to this game.

Question: You have spoken many times about wanting aid and cooperation, whether it be African or otherwise, but not just any kind of aid. What do you mean by this?

Sankara: Aid to Burkina Faso must serve to strengthen, not undermine, our sovereignty. It should help to destroy the need for further aid. All aid that puts further aid to death is welcome in Bur-

kina Faso. But all aid that creates a beggar mentality, we will have to do without. This is why we pay very close attention and impose extremely stringent conditions every time someone promises us aid, or when we take the initiative to ask for it.

You cannot make a revolution or gain your independence without a certain amount of stoicism and sacrifice. This is what the people of Burkina impose on ourselves — precisely so as not to give in to the temptation of taking the easy way out, as some aid we are offered would allow us to do. Luring us on in this way has done a lot of harm to our country and others. We want to put a stop to it.

Question: Comrade president, during your stay in Koupéla [Burkina Faso] you received a member of the International Court of Justice. You surely talked to him about the problems between Burkina Faso and Mali. How is this matter progressing and are you optimistic about the outcome?

Sankara: Forty-five days after we took power, Burkina Faso expressed to the people of Mali our utmost willingness to find a just solution to this problem. We lifted all vetos and did away with any prohibitions or obstacles that might prevent a frank and constructive discussion of this question.²

I should say that spontaneous gestures are generally the most sincere. We consider it very important to assure the people of Mali of our sincerity, our will, and our profound desire to live in peace with them. This is why this ball, which was in our court, has now been thrown into the other court, and there is nothing more for us to do on this matter now. We are looking to the other players, whether it be the International Court of Justice or Mali. We are leaving them the time to act or react and we're not too concerned about it.

Question: Your colleague from Zaire has recently demanded the setting up of a league of black African states. Were you consulted on this, and what do you think of this initiative by President Mobutu? Specifically, do you think that such an organization is the answer to the problems black Africa is facing? And do you think that the conflicts in the Western Sahara and Chad are the cause of the OAU's current difficulties?

Sankara: Your question disturbs me a great deal because you seem to be saying again that the heads of state have been consulted about this famous proposal for a league of black African states. This is what seems to be the case. At any rate I have, fortunately, not been consulted on this. Maybe only those who are thought to have some-

thing to contribute to such a proposal have been consulted.

We are not opposed to Africans who are black regrouping among themselves, given the fact that there are black and white Africans. But we don't really see what this would accomplish. We don't know what purpose it would serve to keep repeating that we are black, as if the problems of the OAU arise because it is two-colored, when we should be thinking of forming a one-colored organization. This is surrealism, a certain kind of art that doesn't move us particularly.

You — and *Jeune Afrique* — seem to talk about the “conflict in the Western Sahara,” while we talk about the conflict between the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic and Morocco. Let's understand each other. You seem to be saying that the SADR and Chad could be the reasons that the OAU is beginning to blow apart, a little as if these two questions, Chad and the SADR, were questions that involve nonblack Africans, and that by eradicating them from the OAU and making the OAU an all-black organization, we could regain our lost harmonious relations. I am not at all convinced that relations between the SADR, which is African and mostly white, and certain African countries that are black, are worse than relations between one particular black African state and another. So it's not a question of color. In terms of component organizations of the OAU, there is no place for the color-sensitive. There is only one color — that of African unity.

Question: What is your view of the evolution, that is, the failure, of the Brazzaville conference?³

Sankara: As you know, we were fully behind the Brazzaville effort. We said it should not become a boxing ring where you bring on the heavyweight champion. We gave all possible support to [Congolese] President Sassou Nguesso so that the conditions for dialogue that he has tried to establish could serve to allow the people of Chad to sort things out among themselves. We said that in order for the conference to be of any value, it would have to recognize the progress made by the people of Chad against their enemies.

Question: On your relations with Libya. Could you give an example of the kind of assistance Libya gives to Burkina Faso?

Sankara: There you are asking a very complicated and difficult question. There are so many examples I could give, we could spend hours and hours, days even, describing the assistance we receive from Libya. We have very good relations with Libya, which only deepen as each country more clearly affirms its own personality and

independence. We are very pleased, very satisfied with the way Libya respects our independence.

We visit Libya often. Not long ago, I met Colonel Qaddafi, and we discussed many questions and opened up a number of mutual criticisms. We are also prepared for self-criticism where we find these criticisms are well-founded and should prompt us to revise our positions. We invite Libya to do the same. Revolutionaries must be able to engage in criticism and self-criticism. This does not mean that Libya is perfect, because nothing is perfect in any country of the world. And this is what gives rise to our discussions. So our relations continue to be as they always have been, except for this new element of mutual criticism and fruitful debate.

Question: During your tour of Africa you visited Mozambique and Angola. As we know, these countries have signed pacts with South Africa that seem, at first sight, to be contrary to their nature. So how does Burkina Faso view these pacts?

Sankara: We have already explained our view on this. There is a question of principle involved here. Racist South Africa will never cease to be a poison, a thorn in Africa's side in general. As long as this thorn has not been removed, this barbarous, backward, anachronistic ideology — apartheid — racism will not be wiped out. So we are unequivocal. We will never change our position on this.

The concrete ways and means, the tactics, for resolving this problem are the business of each country. But the bottom line is that the battle against racism must be waged. We must avoid confusing tactics and strategy. This is why, while we avoid giving lessons to or criticizing our comrades from Mozambique and Angola, we remind them that they have a duty to combat racism. Whatever tactics they may choose, they must wage a permanent fight against this racism. Acting in any other way would be a negation of all the sacrifices made by our African martyrs and of everything that is being done today or was done yesterday.

At the same time, we do not neglect criticizing other African states for not giving concrete and effective support to those countries that have watched over the security of all of us against racism. It is because Mozambique dared to support other regimes that what used to be Rhodesia today lives a different reality. It is because Angola stands guard against South Africa that, from the north to the west of Africa, we escape the direct threat of racism. If these two countries should fall, if the organization of Frontline States should blow apart, we would face a direct, dangerous, and systematic invasion of our

boundaries by the racists.

So we can only invite these two countries to fight ferociously against racism, against racist South Africa. And, by the way, we can only wish them all the necessary vigilance. When you deal with the devil, you must take the precaution of having a spoon with a very long handle — long enough, at least.

Question: What does Burkina Faso think of the preconditions posed by South Africa for granting independence to Namibia, that is, the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola?

Sankara: The precondition South Africa poses is a red herring, because South Africa itself deals with all kinds of countries, including African countries, that have foreign troops on their soil. Why don't they pose the presence of these troops as a problem? Why do they want to keep foreign troops out of Angola, when it is Angola itself that asks for these troops and seems to find their presence and support useful? This is Angola's right. Angola has the sovereign right to call on Cuban troops, and it's to Cuba's credit that Cubans are prepared to go and die for another country when they, too, have danger at their door and on all sides.

In terms of the general question of the presence of foreign troops in this or that country, we think there are some countries that have the right to raise this question and some that have no right at all, especially when they themselves have foreign troops on their own soil. Cuban troops are no less legitimate than these other troops whose presence is aimed at prolonging those countries' domination.

Question: You made reference in your speech to countries that greet you with the kiss of Judas or that support the enemies of your people. Do you consider France to be in this category of countries, and how do you see relations between Burkina Faso and France?

Sankara: It is likely that, at the time, only Jesus spotted Judas — I'm not sure the other eleven disciples did. Let's not get ahead of ourselves and put anyone's intentions on trial. But you know that one Judas recognizes another and can often be caught red-handed plotting against us if he betrays himself by this or that deed.

Of course, in things like this, traitors can always deny everything. But their deepest intentions have a way of coming out in the end. The first of the twelve, Peter, when he was trying to dissociate himself from Jesus, who was being brought to public justice, was himself surprised, and was told "your accent betrayed you."

Well, you've read the Holy Scriptures as well as anyone, so I

won't go on. France has relations with us that may cause surprise, and we think they could be better. Our desire to improve them is certainly there, as we have said repeatedly. But for that to really happen, France will have to learn to deal with African countries — with us, at least — on a new basis, which it does not do, and for which the conditions are not always there. We deeply regret the fact that if [the Socialist Party electoral victory in] May 1981 brought about a transformation in France, you are the only ones who know it. France's relations with Africa, at any rate, have not changed at all.

The regime in France today is following practically the same course as the regimes that preceded it. They are also face to face with the same spokespeople for different African groups. The France of today is no different from the France of yesterday. This is why we who express and transmit a new African reality are not understood, and why we may ripple the tranquil pond of Franco-African relations a bit.

We arrive with a language of truth, a truth that is perhaps blunt and somewhat forthright, but that is accompanied by a sincerity not often found elsewhere. For too long France has been used to the kind of language used by — I wouldn't quite call them bootlickers, but — it is accustomed to hearing the language of local lackeys functioning under neocolonial conditions. It can't understand that there are some who have no desire to be among those ranks.

If people in France would take the time to understand the new reality we are living through in Burkina Faso, as a new reality that is largely shared in many other African countries, if they would take the trouble to accept the way things really are, many things could change. But, unfortunately, they prefer to see the case of Burkina as an accident of history, a fluke, perhaps a transitory phenomenon. No, reality has changed in Africa, and our relations with other countries must evolve to take this into account.

Question: You said that Burkina Faso is open to countries of all different political persuasions. In May 1981, the Socialists took power in France, and yet your country's ideology is still opposed to that of France. Could we say that the relationship between your two countries should be one of friendship that could be qualified as conditional? And if so, what would be the conditions?

Sankara: I think there is no such thing as friendship without conditions. Even sudden passion has its conditions, I believe, and when the novelty wears off the people concerned come down to earth and find reality surprisingly cold.

Friendship between Burkina and any other country is conditional on respect for our sovereignty and for our interests, just as we too have an obligation to respect our partners. Imposing conditions is not a one-way street. We think that any dialogue we have with France must be a frank one. Sincerity, provided that both partners are willing to strive for it, could make it possible to develop a program of friendship.

France's representative, its ambassador here, considers that since August 4, 1983, the scale of diplomatic exchanges between France and then Upper Volta has tipped very much to our detriment. This has many consequences. France continues to believe that the positions of Burkina Faso can be guessed at or interpreted through this or that *prima donna*. This means that France has not grasped the fact that Burkina Faso is a new animal, which, however, reflects a new reality in Africa.

Question: Upper Volta decided not to go to the [1984 Summer] Olympic Games. Why? How do you explain the fact that other African countries have decided to participate?

Sankara: Upper Volta decided not to go, and Burkina Faso has upheld that decision — not because there is not much hope of us bringing home medals, no! — but out of principle. These games, like all other platforms, should be used by us to denounce our enemies and the racism of South Africa. We cannot participate in these games side by side with those who support South Africa's racist policies and those who reject the warnings and condemnations that Africans make aimed at weakening racist South Africa. We do not agree with these forces and have chosen not to participate in the games, even if it means never going to another Olympic Games.

Our position has not been dictated to us by anyone. Every country that has decided not to go has its reasons. Ours have to do with the relations maintained by the British sports world with South Africa. Britain has never accepted any of the particular warnings and protests made against South Africa. Britain has never budged and neither have we. We cannot stand side by side with them while they celebrate. This is a celebration we will not attend. We have no stomach for it.

Question: You know that what often scares the Western world, Europe, and France, is the term "revolution." In your speech, you said that "revolution cannot be exported." Is this a way of reassuring those countries that are a little bit afraid? If borders are merely ad-

ministrative boundaries, why can't revolution be exported?

Sankara: Revolution can't be exported. You cannot impose a particular ideological choice on any people. Exporting revolution would mean in the first instance that we Burkinabè think we can tell others how to solve their problems. This is a counterrevolutionary view, the view of pseudorevolutionaries, proclaimed by the bookish, dogmatic petty bourgeoisie. If it were true it would mean that we ourselves think we imported our revolution, and as such, we must continue the chain.

This is not the case, though we have said that we are not knowledgeable about the experiences of other peoples, their struggles, their successes, their setbacks. The revolution in Burkina Faso takes into account all other revolutions. The [Russian] revolution of 1917, for example, teaches us many things, and the [French] revolution of 1789, and Monroe's theory of "America to the Americans"⁴ likewise — we're interested in all that.

We don't think that having borders that are simply administrative boundaries means that our ideology can invade other countries. If the people of those countries do not accept our ideas, if they reject them, our ideas will not travel very far. For these borders not to be a barrier to ideas, they have to be understood on both sides of the line as mere administrative boundaries. If Burkina Faso sees its borders in this way, but those on the other side of the border see it as a protective wall, you won't find the same process as that between Ghana and Burkina Faso. The more we know about revolution, the more we understand that it represents no danger for the peoples, only strength. Many fear revolution because they don't know it, or because they have only seen excesses as reported by various journalists and media looking for the sensational.

Let's be very precise. We didn't make our revolution to export it, but we don't intend to tie ourselves up in knots to confine the Burkinabè revolution inside an impenetrable fortress. Our revolution is an ideology that blows freely and that is at the service of all those who feel the need to avail themselves of it.

Notes

1. On the first anniversary of the revolution, the Republic of Upper Volta was renamed Burkina Faso, a combination of words in the Jula and Mooré languages meaning Land of Upright Men.

2. Because of a long-standing border dispute, the previous governments of Upper Volta had vetoed Mali's entrance into the West African Monetary

Union (UMOA). Burkina Faso lifted this veto in October 1983.

3. The Brazzaville conference refers to attempts by several African governments to negotiate an end to the civil war in Chad and the withdrawal of foreign troops.

4. In 1823 U.S. President James Monroe formulated a policy warning against European intervention in the Americas. It became known as the Monroe Doctrine.

On Receiving the José Martí Order

September 25, 1984

From September 25 to 30, 1984, Sankara headed a delegation to Cuba, where he met with President Fidel Castro and received the José Martí Order, the highest honor of the Cuban government, shortly after his arrival. Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau member and Minister of Culture Armando Hart spoke at the ceremony. The following are Hart's speech presenting the medal and Sankara's speech in response. They are translated from the French-language edition of Granma Weekly Review, October 7, 1984, published in Havana, Cuba.

Armando Hart

Comrade Fidel;

Dear Comrade Capt. Thomas Sankara,

president of the National Council of the Revolution and head of state and government of Burkina Faso;

Dear comrades of the visiting delegation;

Comrades:

Tonight we have the honor of acting on the resolution of our Council of State to confer on you, dear President Sankara, a high and very cherished distinction: the José Martí Order. Our revolution reserves it for very specific cases. It is a token of well-deserved recognition for those who have rendered outstanding service to the cause of their people, to international relations between our countries; to dignity and honor; or to the struggle against imperialism, colonial and neocolonial domination, and for genuine national liberation. You, Comrade Thomas Sankara, combine all these qualities.

First we should point out the deep feelings of friendship and solidarity with which the leadership of our party, our government, and the entire Cuban people have been following the revolutionary events

unfolding in the former Republic of Upper Volta, today known by its new name, Burkina Faso.

Revolutionary peoples, who have experienced the hard struggle for independence, dignity, and development, have no difficulty in understanding the efforts and battles of other fraternal peoples. They feel the need to extend direct political support and solidarity — something that is always important, but even more so at the outset of a revolution. This is how we feel toward the people of Burkina Faso, toward the process of renewal and transformation taking place in their country and toward their outstanding leader, Capt. Thomas Sankara.

President Sankara is a fine example of the role that patriotic military young people, with advanced ideas and deep commitments to the people, can and are playing in the struggle for the liberation and development of their countries. Comrade Captain Sankara has led the progressive forces of the army, the workers, and the young people of his country with admirable tenacity, intelligence, and courage. He has managed to frustrate reactionary maneuvers aimed at bringing the revolutionary process to a halt. You, together with your people, have blocked the reestablishment of the neocolonialist order with its accompanying poverty, oppression, and corruption — problems that the new leadership of Burkina Faso is combating.

We feel a deep identification with these objectives and with Burkina Faso's active international policy — a policy of solidarity with the African peoples, who face apartheid, the aggression of the South African racists, and domination by the forces of reaction and imperialism; a policy of support for national liberation movements and of adherence to the principles of the Nonaligned Movement; and finally, its policy of unity against imperialism and in the struggle for peace.

We are confident, dear Comrade Sankara, that this visit by yourself and your delegation, and your conversations with Comrade Fidel and other leaders of the Cuban revolution, will serve to further strengthen our fraternal bonds and will mark a higher stage of friendship and cooperation between our countries, which have been developing so satisfactorily.

Burkina Faso and Cuba have relations that were established very recently. Imperialism and colonialism separated us for a long time. But, in reality, our ties go back centuries and it is only now, in this era of revolution, that we can do them justice. In the past, countless sons and daughters of your country were uprooted from their native land and brought to Cuba in chains, as slaves for unscrupulous

exploiters. They contributed their labor and gave up their lives in the forging of a new nation, for whose independence they would later fight with admirable heroism. José Martí, the extraordinary Cuban who symbolizes the pinnacle of revolutionary thought in Cuba and America in the last century, and whose name has been given to this cherished award, expressed in burning verse his unforgettable impression as a child witnessing the terrible tableau of African slavery. He trembled with passion for those who cried out in pain and pledged to vindicate that crime with his blood. Today Fidel is completing the work Martí was unable to finish. In both Cuba and Burkina Faso revolution has made those dreams a reality.

Today, those who come to our two countries no longer come as men enchained in slavery but as men bearing the star of liberty. In this spirit, as an expression of friendship, admiration, and respect, dear Comrade Sankara, receive from the hands of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro the medal of the José Martí Order.

Thomas Sankara

Comrades:

Revolutionaries do not waste time throwing hypocritical bouquets to one another, an art reactionaries have perfected.

In presenting me with the highest distinction of the Cuban revolution, the Cuban people confer an honor on my people that is more than a symbolic gesture. It is a commitment of political support for my country, Burkina Faso, and its democratic and popular revolution. It is a firm commitment founded on the memory of one of the greatest patriots not only of Cuba and Latin America, but of all corners of the world where peoples are fighting for freedom and independence.

This distinction is a demonstration of the deep love the Cuban people feel for my people. Did not José Martí himself entitle his unforgettable work, "Love Is Repaid with Love"? José Martí, who at the early age of sixteen was deported from his country for his revolutionary political ideas, felt in his bones and his blood the reality of militant solidarity among the peoples of the world.

There is love among peoples; peoples know how to love. For nine years, Martí lived in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala, where he was as one with the peoples and earned their love. Without that profound love, his two deportations of 1869 and 1879 could have discouraged him and sapped his morale. But in 1895 José Martí

returned to his country to take up arms against the colonial oppressors. This man who died at Dos Ríos fighting for the freedom of all the world's peoples belongs to us all — to Cuba and to Burkina Faso.

It is with the valiant blood of heroes such as he that peoples are nurtured and gather the strength required to wage increasingly important battles. Comrade Fidel Castro and his comrades in the Sierra Maestra in 1956 were simply carrying forward the revolutionary battle opened up by the Cuban people for their full freedom.

The revolutionaries and people of Burkina Faso, who spent years combating reactionary and proimperialist regimes, were continuing and today are still continuing the battle joined by José Martí. Cuba and Burkina Faso are so far and yet so near, so different and yet so similar, that only revolutionaries can understand the sincere love that pushes us irresistibly toward mutual support.

My country is small. It covers 274,000 square kilometers and has a population of seven million — seven million peasant men and women, who live under conditions identical to, if not worse, than those endured by your people under the fascist Batista dictatorship. Running water, three meals a day, a clinic, a school, and a simple plow are still elements of an ideal in life that millions of people in my country have not yet achieved after a year of revolutionary power. It must be said that the legacy of the past is heavy. It is under these conditions that the National Council of the Revolution and the people of Burkina Faso conquered state power and wield it today.

But there are positive examples such as yours that raise the morale of the less-determined, strengthen the revolutionary convictions of others, and spur people on to struggle against the centers of hunger, disease, and ignorance that still exist in our country.

We have been fighting, we fight, and will continue to fight to create with our own hands the material base for our happiness. In this fight we know we can count at all times on the firm support of the revolutionary people of Cuba and all those who have embraced José Martí's ideals.

May José Martí hear me!

May this medal guide me and my comrades in leading our revolution to victory at the service of the people who are demanding their share of happiness.

It is in no way accidental that our national slogan is one you know well: Homeland or death, we will triumph!

We Want to Be Free to Give Our Culture Its Full Significance

October 2, 1984

While visiting New York City to address the United Nations General Assembly, Sankara spoke at the opening of an exhibition of Burkinabè art at the Third World Trade Center in Harlem, on October 2, 1984. The text is translated from a transcript of the meeting.

Dear friends, thank you for giving me the opportunity to present Burkina Faso to you. As our brother just explained so well, we have changed the name of our country. This change is in harmony with a rebirth we are currently experiencing. We have put Upper Volta to death in order to allow Burkina Faso to be reborn. For us, the name Upper Volta is a symbol of colonization. We feel we have no more interest in an Upper Volta than we would have in a Lower, Western, or Eastern Volta. Our exhibition here allows us to present the real name we have chosen — Burkina Faso — to the whole world. This is a very big opportunity for us.

We chose to launch the exhibition here in Harlem. You might ask why. It is because we believe that the struggle we are waging in Africa and in Burkina Faso is the same struggle you are waging here in Harlem. And we believe that we in Africa must give our brothers in Harlem all the support needed so that their struggle, too, can become known. When people the world over become aware that Harlem is a living heart that beats to Africa's rhythm, Harlem will be respected by everyone. Any African head of state who comes to New York *must* first pass through Harlem. This is why we consider that our White House is in black Harlem.

This exhibition you have come to see this evening has a deep significance for us. It transmits our entire past as well as our present. At the same time, it opens the door to our future. It constitutes a living link between us and our ancestors, us and our children.

Each object you see here expresses the pain of the African. It ex-

presses, too, the struggle we are waging not only against natural scourges, but also against enemies who have come to subjugate us. Each object expresses the source of energy on which we rely to wage our struggle, whether presented in the style of our ancestors or in modern style. We think that our future is portrayed here also, embodied in these objects of art.

The magic concealed in these objects, in these masks, is perhaps the same magic that prompted others to have confidence in the future, to explore the heavens, and send rockets to the moon. We want to be left free to give our art and culture its full significance. It is, after all, a magical phenomenon when light appears at the simple touch of a button. If barriers had been placed in the path of Jules Verne, we would not be seeing the developments in space we are witnessing today.

Our ancestors in Africa were involved in their own form of development. We do not want these great African sages to be written out of history. This is why we have decided to create a center for the research of the black man in Burkina Faso. At this center we will study the origins of the black man, the evolution of his culture and his music around the world, as well as his dress, his cuisine, and his languages the world over. In short, we will study everything that can enable us to affirm our own identity.

This center will not be a closed center. We call on all Africans to come and study there — Africans from Africa, those outside of Africa, Africans from Harlem. We call on each and every one to come and participate on whatever level to further the development and flowering of the African man. We hope that this exhibition will be only a prelude to this enormous task that lies before us.

Let's make sure, dear brothers and comrades, that the coming generations cannot accuse us of stifling the black man or selling him short.

I won't take more of your time. We are expecting other articles to arrive to complete this exhibition, specifically, objects in bronze, I believe, and I hope I will have the opportunity to come back to Harlem again, maybe tomorrow or the day after to discuss this exhibition with you.

I thank you again for allowing Burkina Faso, an African country, to express itself here. In the name of the people of Burkina Faso, in the name of our brothers here in Harlem, I declare this exhibition open!

Thank you.

Our White House Is in Black Harlem

October 3, 1984

On October 3, 1984, Sankara spoke to more than 500 people at the Harriet Tubman School in Harlem at a meeting sponsored by the Patrice Lumumba Coalition. The text is translated from a transcript.

Imperialism!

[*Shouts of "Down with it!"*]

Imperialism!

[*Shouts of "Down with it!"*]

Neocolonialism!

[*Shouts of "Down with it!"*]

Racism!

[*Shouts of "Down with it!"*]

Puppet regimes!

[*Shouts of "Down with them!"*]

Glory!

[*Shouts of "To the people!"*]

Dignity!

[*Shouts of "To the people!"*]

Power!

[*Shouts of "To the people!"*]

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you, comrades. [*Prolonged applause*]

I'm not going to speak for long, because those who spoke before me have already explained what the revolution should be. The comrade who is a member of the Central Committee [of the All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party] explained very well what the revolution should be and what kind of commitment we must have to it. The comrade reverend has explained in rather ironical terms what the revolution should be. The comrades from other regions on and off the continent have also explained what the revolution should be. The sing-

ers, dancers, and musicians have also told us what the revolution should be. What remains for us now is to make the revolution! [Applause]

A moment ago, as I watched your ballet, I really thought I was in Africa. [Applause] This is why, as I have always said — and I'll say it again — that our White House is in black Harlem. [Prolonged applause]

There are many of us who think of Harlem as a trash heap — a place to suffocate in. But there are also many of us who think that Harlem will give the African soul its true dimension. [Applause] As African people we are numerous — very numerous. We should understand that our existence must be devoted to the struggle to rehabilitate the African man. We must wage the struggle, the struggle that will free us from domination and oppression by other men.

Certain blacks are afraid and prefer to swear allegiance to whites. [Applause] We must denounce this! We must fight against it! We must be proud to be black! [Prolonged applause] Remember, there are many politicians who think of blacks only on the eve of elections. But we must be black with other blacks daytime and nighttime. [Prolonged applause]

Our struggle is a call for building. But our demand is not to build a world for blacks alone and against other men. As black people, we want to teach other people how to love each other. Despite their maliciousness toward us, we will know how to resist and then teach them the meaning of solidarity. We also know that we must be organized and determined. [Applause] We have brothers in South Africa. They must be freed. [Prolonged applause]

Last year I met [Grenada's Prime Minister] Maurice Bishop. We had a lengthy discussion and gave each other some mutual advice. When I returned to my country, imperialism arrested me. I thought about Maurice Bishop. Some time later I was freed from prison thanks to a mobilization by our people. Again, I thought about Maurice Bishop. I wrote him a letter, which I never had the opportunity to send him, again because of imperialism.

So we have learned that from now on we must fight relentlessly against imperialism. If we don't want to see other Maurice Bishops assassinated tomorrow, we have to start mobilizing today. [Prolonged applause]

This is why I want to show you that I am ready for imperialism! [Unbuckles belt and holds up holster and pistol. Cheers and prolonged applause] And you can believe me, this is not a toy. These bullets are real! And when we fire them it will be against imperialism

and for all black people and for all those who suffer from domination. It will also be for those whites who are genuine brothers of black people; and for Ghana, because Ghana is our brother.

You may know why we organized the Bold Union maneuvers.¹ It was to show imperialism what we are capable of inflicting. Many African countries prefer to organize their military maneuvers jointly with foreign powers. When we organize our next maneuvers, there must be combatants from Harlem to participate with us. [*Cheers and prolonged applause*]

Our revolution is symbolized by our flag. This is our country's new flag. Our country also has a new name. This flag, as you can see, resembles the black liberation flag. This is because we are all one. We are working for the same cause as you. This is why, quite naturally, the colors are alike. They signify the same thing. We didn't have to use the color black, however, because we are already in Africa. [*Applause, cheers, shouts of "Down with imperialism!"*] But you can consider the two flags as equal.

You know it's important that every day each one of you remember one thing. While we are here discussing and talking to each other as Africans, there are spies among us to report back tomorrow morning. We say to them that they don't need to bring microphones because it's obvious that even if the television cameras were here, we would be saying exactly the same thing! [*Applause*]

I want to say that we have the power and the capacity within ourselves to combat imperialism. You need remember only one thing: when the people stand up, imperialism trembles. [*Applause*]

I was very impressed with the ballet you performed. This is why I would like to invite you to the next Week of National Culture that will take place in Burkina Faso in December. Even if you can send only one person, you must send someone. [*Applause*] I would like to invite you, too, to the next pan-African film festival in Ouagadougou in February. All the African countries will be represented. South Africa will be represented by the African liberation movement. Harlem must be there! [*Applause*]

We will do everything in our power to send you troupes from Burkina Faso to perform in support of our African brothers and sisters here. I ask you to encourage and support them and to make it possible for them to get to other cities so that they can meet other Africans here in the United States.

I've noticed that you have a lot of respect for Comrade Jerry John Rawlings. I will send you some African clothing with his photo. We have also printed on these clothes: "Ghana-Burkina Faso

— same struggle.” [Applause]

Wear these clothes everywhere — to work, in the streets, when you do your shopping, everywhere. Be proud of it. Show everyone that you are African. Don’t ever be ashamed of being African! [Applause]

I said that I wouldn’t be long and before ending I would like you all to stand up, because tomorrow, when I address the United Nations, I will speak about the ghettos and Nelson Mandela, who must be set free. [Applause] I will speak about injustice, racism, and about the hypocrisy of leaders around the world.

But I will also explain that you and we — all of us — are waging our struggle and that they would do well to take note. [Applause] Because you represent the people, and wherever you are on your feet, imperialism trembles! I invite you to repeat with me, “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”

[Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”]

Again!

[Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”]

Again!

[Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”]

[Applause]

Imperialism!

[Shouts of “Down with it!”]

Imperialism!

[Shouts of “Down with it!”]

Puppet regimes!

[Shouts of “Down with them!”]

Racism!

[Shouts of “Down with it!”]

Zionism!

[Shouts of “Down with it!”]

Neocolonialism!

[Shouts of “Down with it!”]

Glory!

[Shouts of “To the people!”]

Dignity!

[Shouts of “To the people!”]

Music!

[Shouts of “To the people!”]

Health!

[Shouts of “To the people!”]

Education!

[Shouts of "To the people!"]

Power!

[Shouts of "To the people!"]

All the power!

[Shouts of "To the people!"]

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

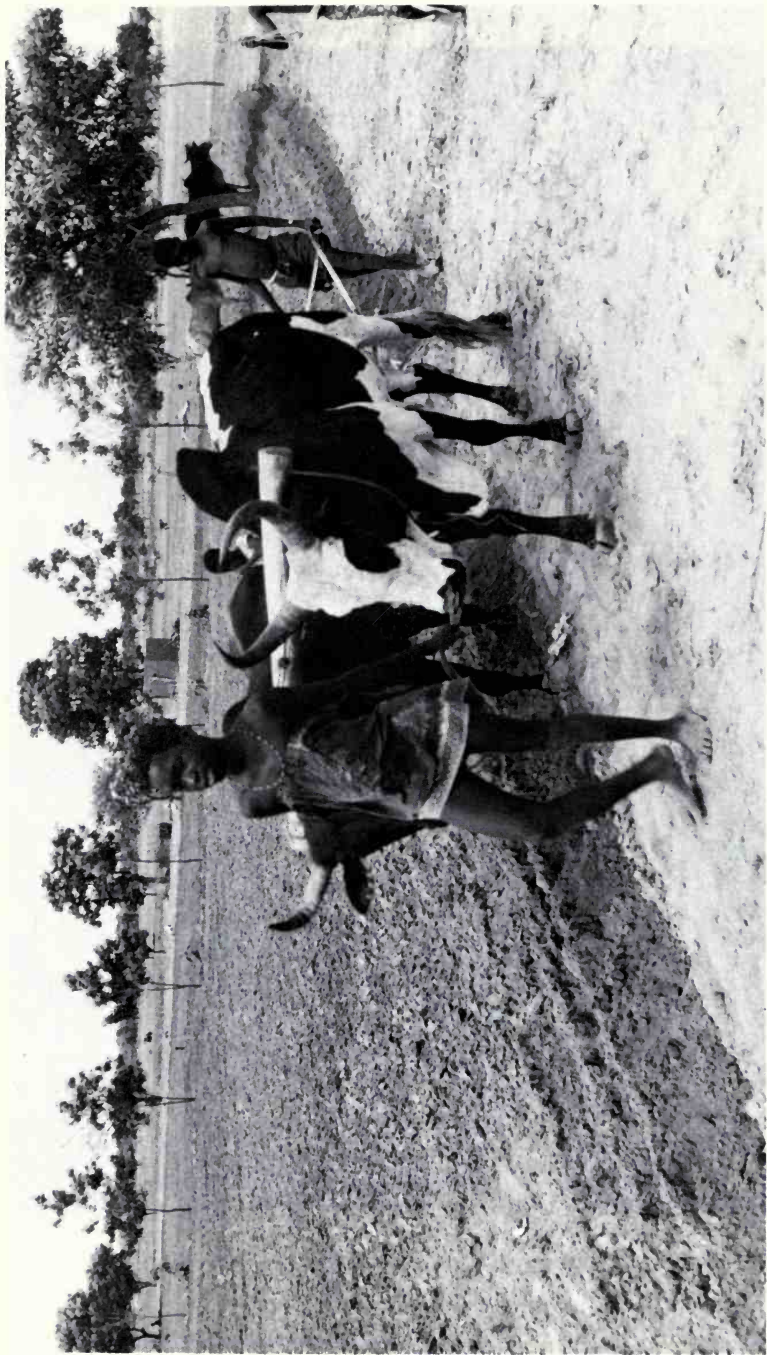
Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you, comrades.

[Prolonged applause]

Notes

1. Burkina Faso and Ghana held joint military maneuvers in Ghana, November 4-8, 1983.

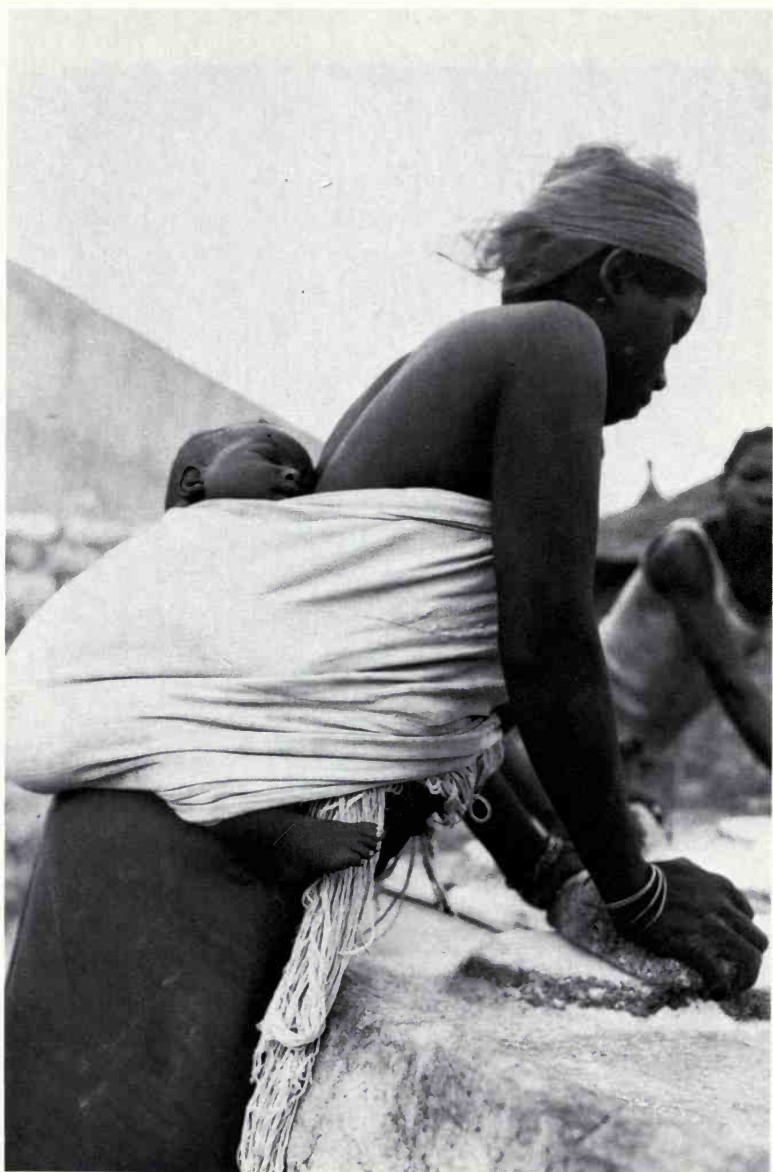


Peasants prepare land for planting, mid-1970s.



UN photo

Peasant irrigates field near Dori, Upper Volta, mid-1970s.

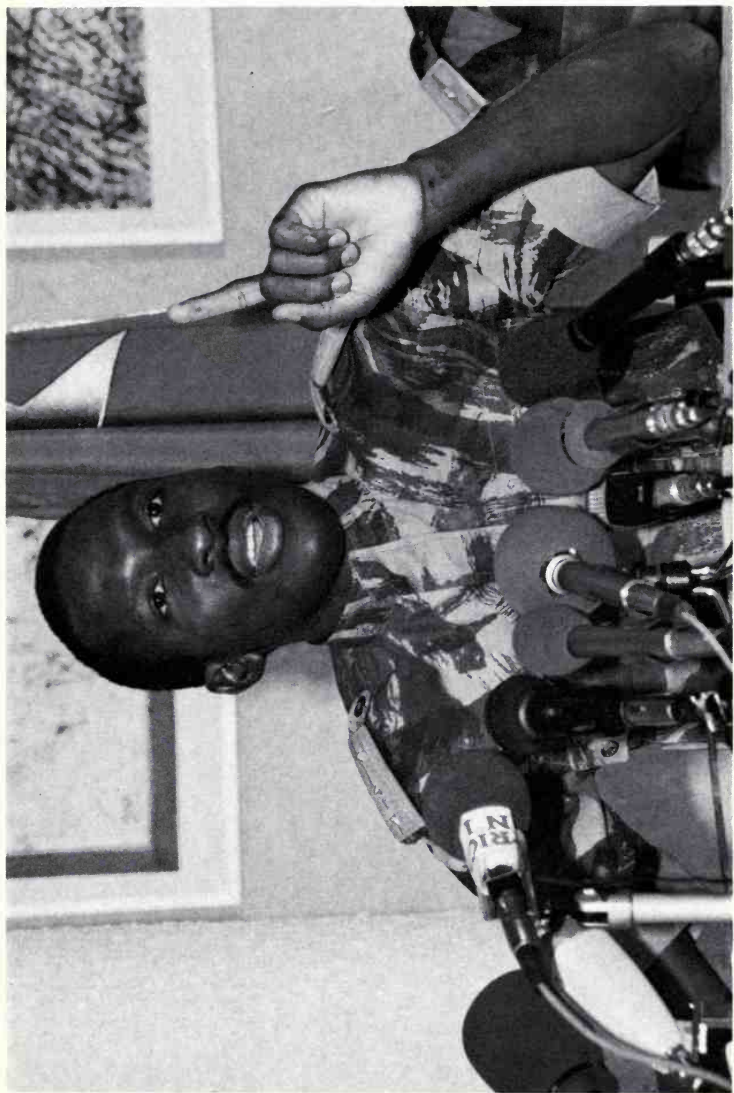


Village woman grinds millet, May 1983.

UN photo



Thomas Sankara, at left, greets crowd in Ouagadougou.



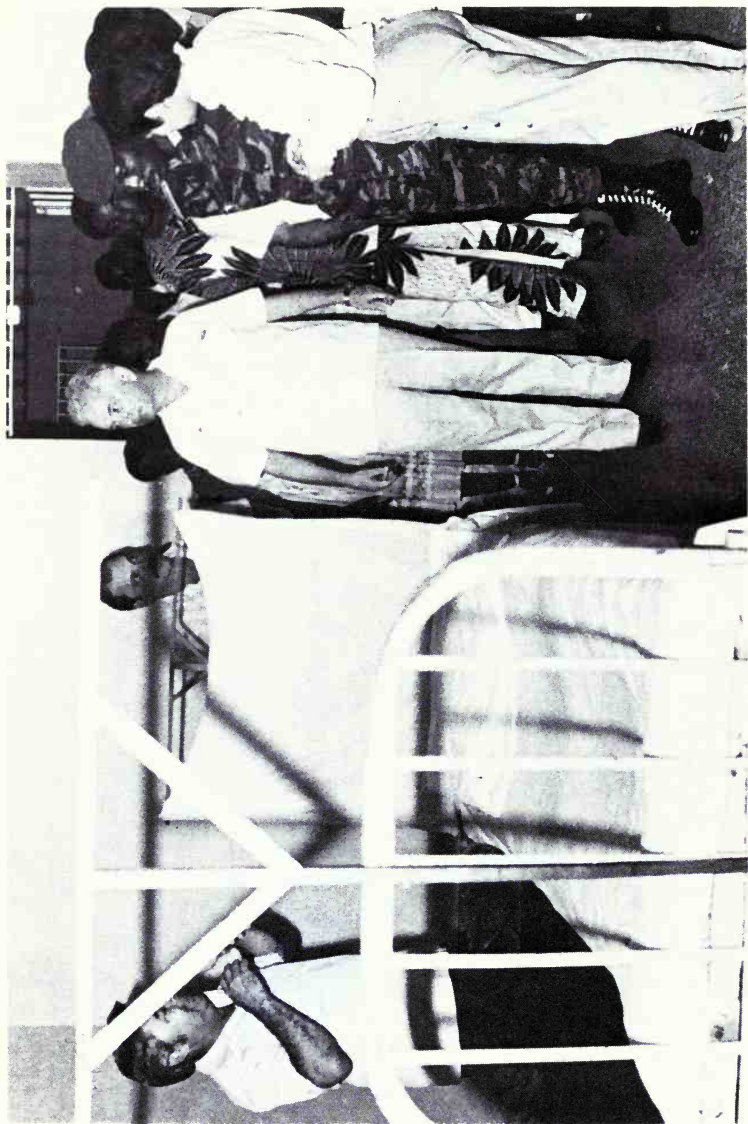
Margaret A. Novicki/Africa Report

Thomas Sankara.





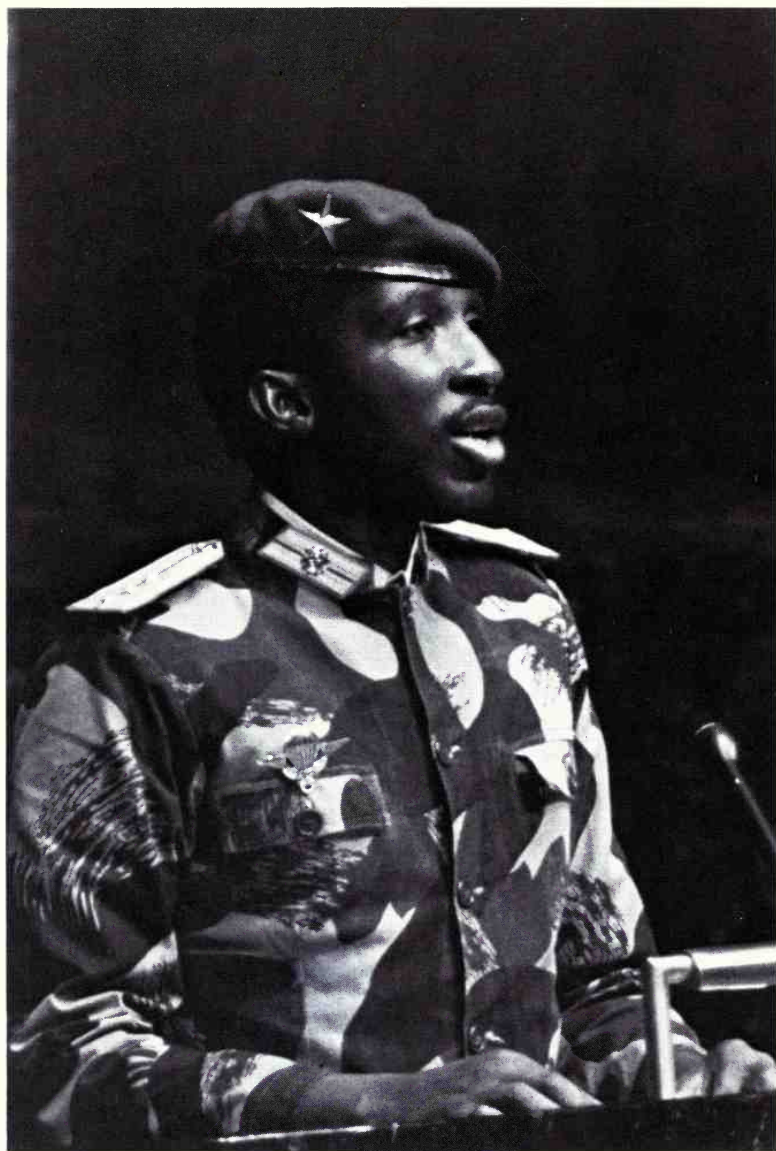
Top, Cuban President Fidel Castro welcomes Sankara, September 25, 1984, to Havana, Cuba. Bottom, Sankara receives José Martí Order.



Sankara and Cuban Minister of Culture Armando Hart visit cell where Castro was imprisoned on the Isle of Pines, 1953-55.

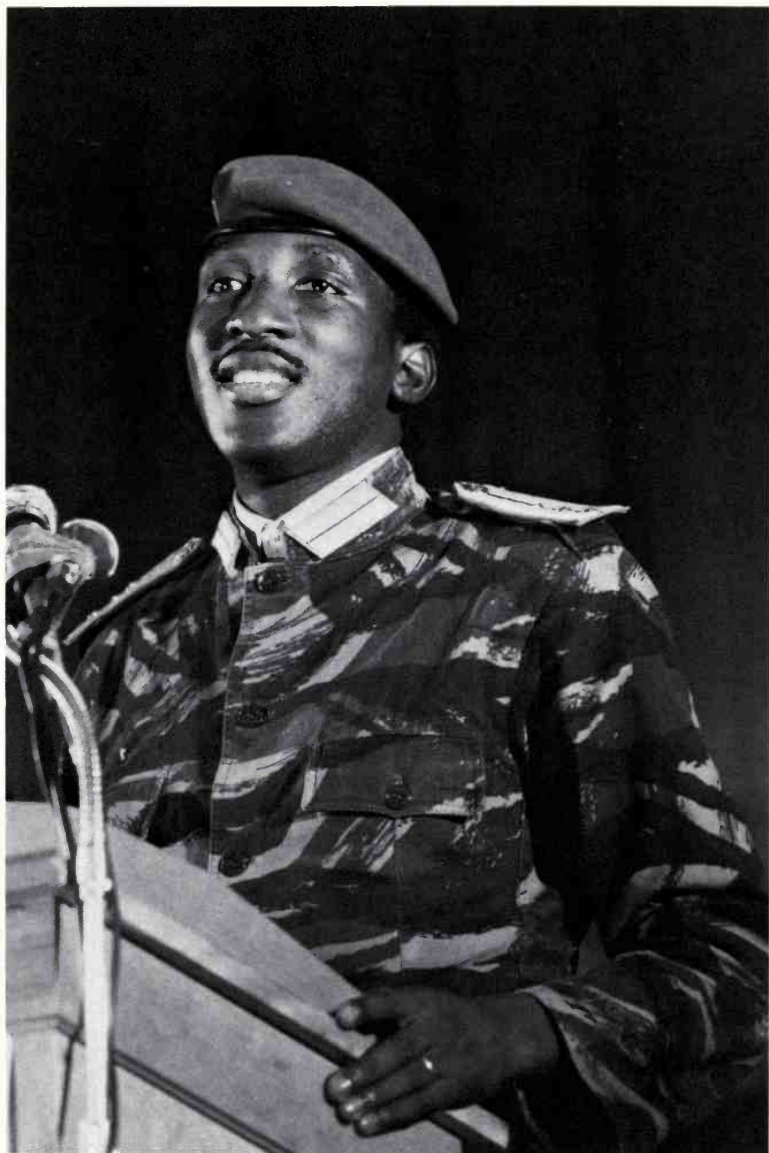


Sankara with Jerry Rawlings, Ghana's head of state.



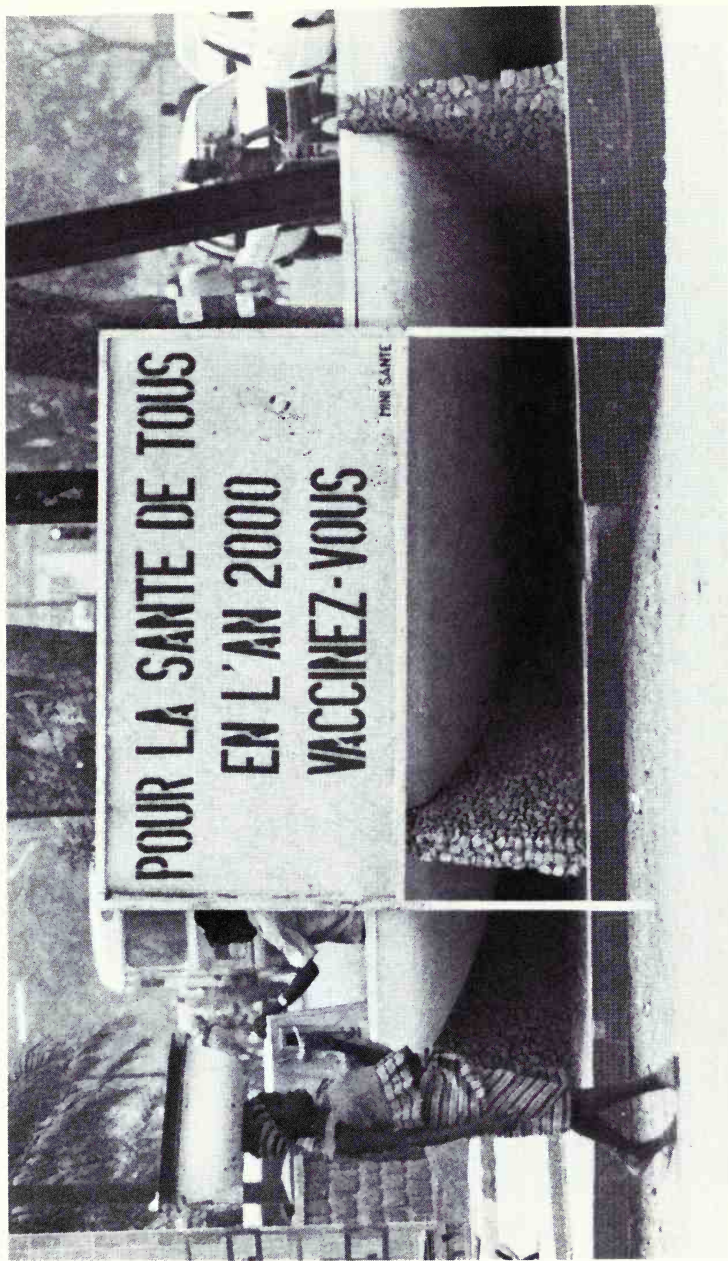
UN photo

Sankara addresses the UN General Assembly, October 1984.

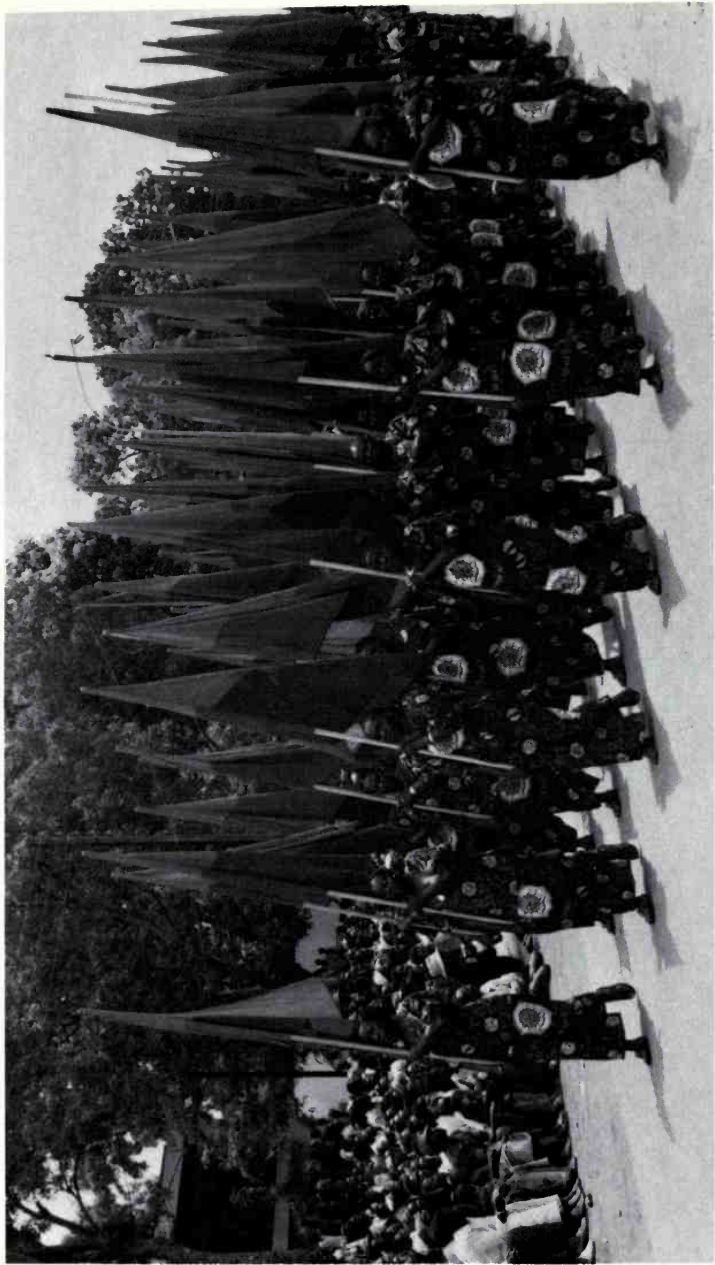


Ernest Harsch/Militant

Sankara speaks in Harlem, New York, October 1984.

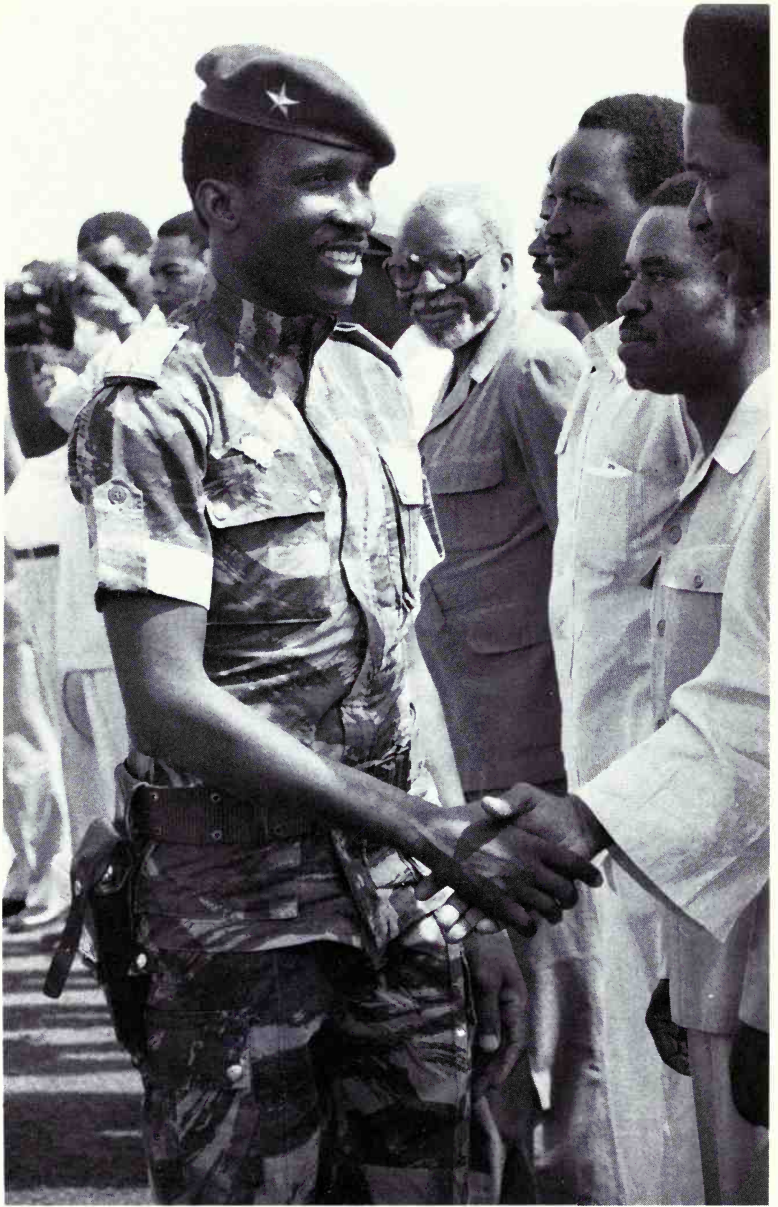


Billboard in Ouagadougou. "For everyone's health in the year 2,000, get vaccinated."



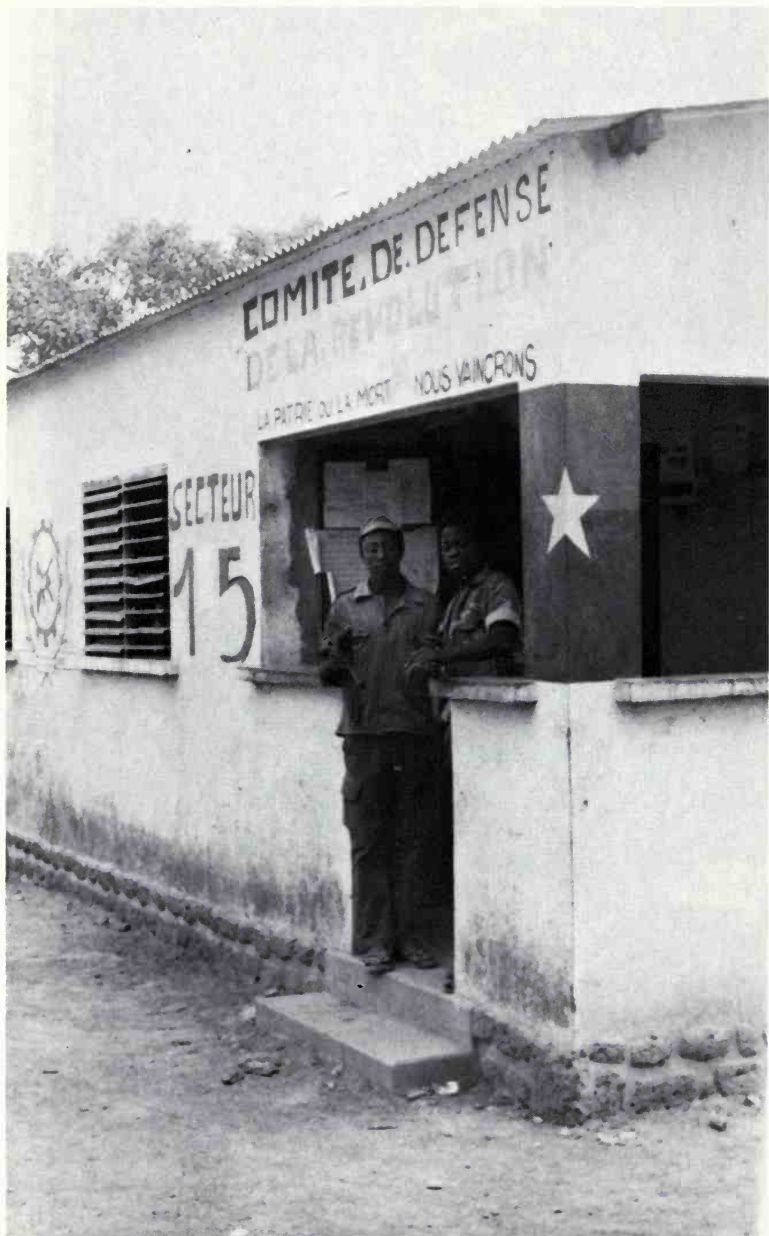
Pat Hunt/Militant

Second anniversary of the revolution, August 4, 1985.

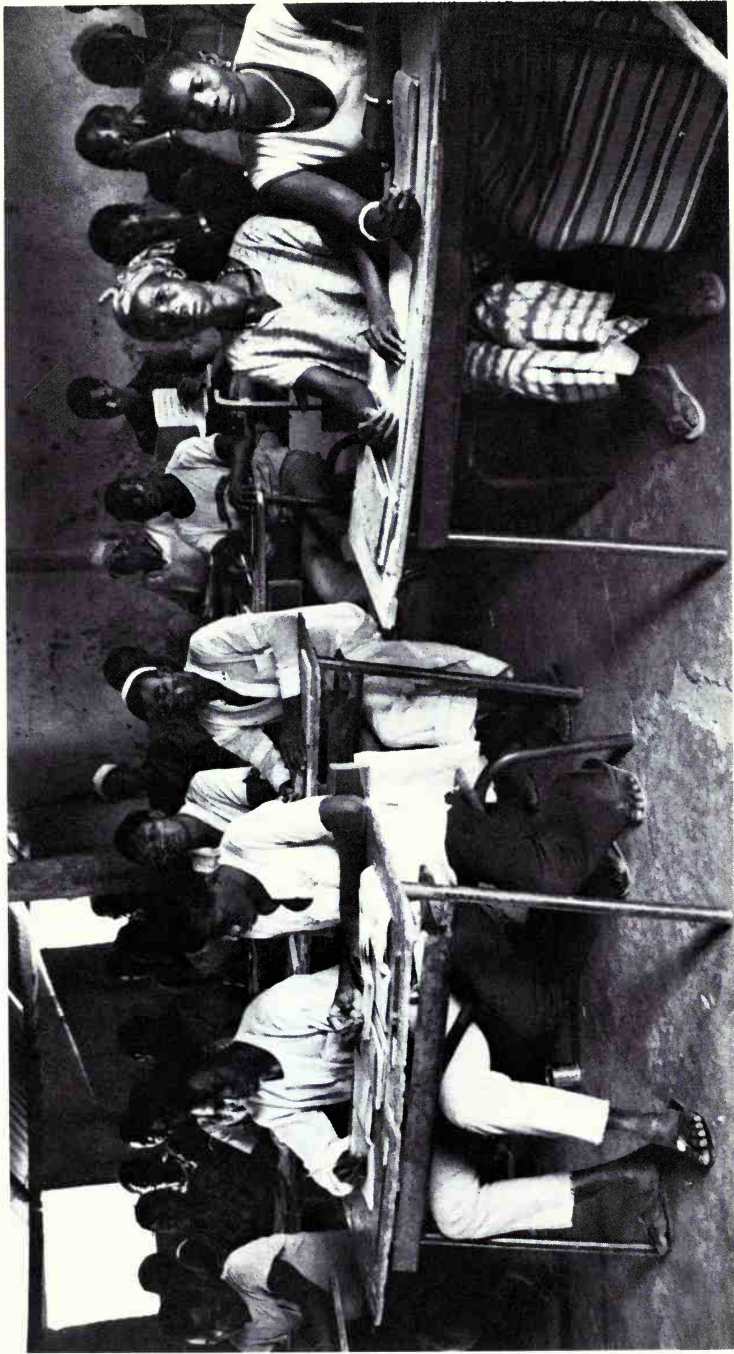


Margaret A. Novicki/Africa Report

Sankara greets crowd in Orodara, Burkina Faso, 1986.



Ernest Harsch/Militant
Committee for the Defense of the Revolution office, Ouagadougou.



Literacy campaign, Kamboince, Burkina Faso, March 1986.

Freedom Can Be Won Only Through Struggle

October 4, 1984

Sankara's speech to the Thirty-ninth Session of the UN General Assembly on October 4, 1984, is translated from a pamphlet issued by the Mission of Burkina Faso.

Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary General;

Honorable representatives of the international community:

I am here to bring you fraternal greetings from a country that covers 274,000 square kilometers and whose seven million children, women, and men refuse henceforth to die from ignorance, hunger, and thirst. These are people who, despite a quarter century of existence as a sovereign state represented here at the United Nations, are still not able to really live.

I am here to address this Thirty-ninth Session in the name of a people that has decided, on the soil of its ancestors, henceforth to assert itself and to affirm and take charge of its own history — both its positive and negative aspects — without the slightest inhibition.

I am here, finally, mandated by the National Council of the Revolution of Burkina Faso, to express the views of my people concerning the problems on our agenda — problems that constitute the tragic web of events so painfully splitting the foundations of our world at the end of this twentieth century.

This world is one in which humanity is in chaos, torn apart by struggles between the great and the not-so-great, attacked by armed bands and subjected to violence and pillage. It is a world in which nations act outside international law, commanding gangs of bandits who, gun in hand, live by plunder and other sordid trafficking.

Mr. President:

I make no claim to set forth doctrines here. I am neither messiah nor prophet. I possess no truths. My goal is twofold: first, to be able

to speak on behalf of my people, the people of Burkina Faso, in simple words, in the language of facts and clarity; and second, in my own way, to speak for the great, disinherited people of the world, so disparagingly named the Third World. I wish to explain the reasons for our revolt, even though I may not succeed in making you understand them.

All of this demonstrates our interest in the United Nations. Our rights require that we come here with the vigor and rigor born of our clear awareness of our duty.

No one should be surprised to see us associate the former Upper Volta — today Burkina Faso — with this despised ragbag called the Third World, a world invented at the time of formal independence in order to better perpetuate foreign control of our intellectual, cultural, economic, and political life.

We place ourselves within this world, while giving no credence to this gigantic fraud of history nor accepting the status of the “hinterland of the satiated West.” We do so to affirm our awareness of belonging to a tricontinental whole and to acknowledge as a Nonaligned country and with the full depth of our convictions that a special solidarity unites the three continents of Asia, Latin America, and Africa in a single struggle against the same political gangsters and the same economic exploiters.

In acknowledging that we are part of the Third World we are, to paraphrase José Martí, “affirming that our cheek feels the blow struck against any man, anywhere in the world.” Until now we have turned the other cheek. The blows were redoubled. The evil heart did not soften. The truth of the righteous was trampled under foot. The word of Christ was betrayed and his cross was transformed into a club. They put on his robe and rent our bodies and souls asunder. They obscured his message. They westernized it, while we understood it as one of universal liberation. Well, our eyes are now open to the class struggle, and there will be no more blows.

We must state categorically that there is no salvation for our people unless we turn our backs on all the models that charlatans of all types have tried to sell us for twenty years. There is no salvation outside of this rejection. There is no development separate from a rupture of this kind. All those new intellectual giants who are emerging from their slumber — awakened by the dizzying rise of billions of men in rags, aghast at the threat of this hunger-driven multitude weighing on their digestion — are beginning to rework their speeches.

Rather than looking to us, they are once more anxiously searching

for miracle concepts and new forms of development for our countries. A reading of the numerous publications of innumerable forums and seminars is ample illustration of this.

Far be it for me to ridicule the patient efforts of honest intellectuals who, because they have eyes to see, are discovering the terrible consequences of the devastation imposed on us by so-called specialists in the development of the Third World. My fear is to see the fruits of so much energy coopted by Prosperos of all kinds who — with a wave of their magic wand — spirit us back to a world of slavery dressed up in today's fashions.

My fear is justified even more by the fact that the educated petty bourgeoisie of Africa — if not of the entire Third World — is not prepared to give up its privileges, either because of intellectual laziness or simply because it has tasted the Western way of life. Because of this these petty bourgeois forget that all genuine political struggle requires rigorous, theoretical debate, and they refuse to rise to the intellectual effort of conceiving new concepts equal to the murderous struggle that lies ahead of us. Passive and pathetic consumers, they wallow in terminology fetishized by the West just as they wallow in Western whiskey and champagne in shady-looking lounges.

Ever since the concepts of negritude and African Personality,¹ now showing their age, the search for ideas that are genuinely new produced by the brains of our "great" intellectuals is in vain. Our vocabulary and our ideas come from elsewhere. Our professors, engineers, and economists are content to simply add color — for often the only things they brought back with them from the European universities that produced them are their degrees and their velvety adjectives and superlatives!

It is both necessary and urgent that our trained personnel and those who work with the pen learn that there is no such thing as neutral writing. In these stormy times we cannot give today's and yesterday's enemies a monopoly over thought, imagination, and creativity.

Before it is too late — and it is already late — this elite, these men of Africa and of the Third World, must come home to themselves, that is, to their societies and to the misery we have inherited. They must understand that the battle for an ideology that serves the needs of the disinherited masses is not in vain. But they must understand, too, that they can only become credible on an international level by being genuinely creative — by portraying a faithful image of their people, an image conducive to carrying out fundamental change in political and social conditions and to wrenching our countries from foreign domination and exploitation, which leave us no other per-

spective than bankruptcy.

This is what we, the Burkinabè people, understood the night of August 4, 1983, when the first stars began to sparkle in the skies of our homeland. We had to take the leadership of the peasant revolts that were breaking out in a countryside driven wild by the advancing desert, abandoned and exhausted by hunger and thirst. We had to give direction to the rumbling revolt of the urban masses who were without work, frustrated, and weary of watching the limousines driven by estranged elites that take turns heading the government and offer them nothing but false solutions conceived by the brains of others. We had to give an ideological soul to the just struggles being waged by the popular masses as they mobilized against the monster of imperialism. We had to replace forever the short-lived brushfire of passing revolt with revolution, the permanent struggle against all forms of domination.

Others have explained before me, and others will undoubtedly explain again, the extent to which the chasm has widened between the affluent peoples and those whose only aspiration is to eat their fill and quench their thirst, to survive and preserve their dignity. But the extent to which the crops of the poor have fattened the rich man's cattle in our countries is beyond imagination!

What was formerly Upper Volta was one of the most striking examples of this process. We were the wondrous concentration, the essence, of all the calamities that have ever swept down on the so-called developing countries. The example of foreign aid, much heralded and presented without rhyme or reason as a panacea, bears eloquent witness to this fact. Very few countries have been as inundated as Burkina with every conceivable form of aid. Theoretically, this aid is supposed to work in favor of our development. In the case of what was formerly Upper Volta, you can search in vain for a sign of anything that could be called development. Those in power, either out of naïveté or class selfishness, could not or would not take control of this influx from abroad or understand its significance and place demands on it in keeping with the interests of our people.

After analyzing a table published in 1983 by the Sahel Club, Jacques Giri, with much good sense, concludes in his book, *Le Sahel demain* (Tomorrow's Sahel), that because of its content and the mechanisms that govern its use, aid to the Sahel today is simply aid for survival. Thirty percent of this aid, he underlines, simply enables the Sahel to stay alive. According to Giri, the only goal of foreign aid is to continue developing nonproductive sectors, imposing unbearable burdens on our meager budgets, disorganizing our countryside,

increasing the deficits in our balance of trade, and accelerating our indebtedness.

A few simple facts serve to describe the former Upper Volta: A country with seven million inhabitants, more than six million of whom are peasants; an infant mortality rate estimated at 180 per 1,000 and an illiteracy rate of up to 98 percent, if we define as literate someone who can read, write, and speak a language; an average life expectancy of only forty years; one doctor for 50,000 inhabitants; a school-attendance rate of only 16 percent; and, finally, a Gross Domestic Product of 53,356 CFA francs per capita, or barely over \$100. The diagnosis before us was somber. The cause of the illness was political. The cure could only be political.

Of course, we encourage aid that helps us to overcome the need for aid. But in general, the policy of foreign aid and assistance produced nothing but disorganization and continued enslavement. It robbed us of our sense of responsibility for our own economic, political, and cultural territory.

We chose to risk new paths to achieve greater happiness. We chose to apply new techniques and to look for forms of organization better suited to our civilization. We abruptly and definitively rejected all forms of foreign diktats, thus creating the conditions for a dignity worthy of our ambitions. To reject mere survival and ease the pressures; to liberate the countryside from feudal paralysis or regression; to democratize our society and open our minds to a universe of collective responsibility in order to dare to invent the future. To shatter the administrative apparatus, then rebuild it with a new kind of state employee; to fuse our army with the people through productive labor and with the reminder that without patriotic political education, a military man is nothing but a criminal in power — this is our political program.

On the level of economic planning, we are learning how to live modestly and are prepared to endure self-imposed austerity in order to be able to carry out ambitious projects.

Already, thanks to a national solidarity fund made up of voluntary contributions, we are beginning to find answers to the harsh questions posed by the drought. We support and have applied the Alma Ata principles by increasing our range of primary health-care services. We have adopted the GOBI FFF Strategy proposed by UNICEF, by making it government policy.²

We think that the UN should use its Sahel Office to establish a medium- and long-term plan to enable all countries that suffer from drought to achieve self-sufficiency in food.

In preparation for the twenty-first century, we have launched a massive campaign to educate and train our children in a new kind of school, financed by establishing a special section of our lottery, "Teach our children." And, thanks to the work of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, we have launched a vast construction project to build public housing (500 units in three months), roads, and small reservoirs, etc. Our economic goal is to create a situation where every Burkinabè can at least use his brain and hands to produce enough to guarantee him two meals per day and drinking water.

We swear — we state categorically — that henceforth nothing in Burkina Faso will ever again be undertaken without the participation of Burkinabè. Henceforth, we will conceive and decide on everything. This is a precondition. There will be no further assaults on our sense of decency and dignity.

Fortified by this conviction, we would like our words to embrace all those who are in pain and all those whose dignity is being trampled on by a handful of men or by a system intent on crushing them.

To all those listening to me, allow me to say that I speak not only in the name of my beloved Burkina Faso, but also in the name of all those who are suffering in any corner of the world. I speak in the name of the millions who live in ghettos because they have black skin or because they come from different cultures, and whose status is barely better than that of an animal. I suffer in the name of the Indians who have been massacred, crushed, humiliated, and confined for centuries on reservations to the point where they can claim no rights and their culture cannot enrich itself through beneficial union with others, including the culture of the invader. I speak out in the name of those thrown out of work by a system that is structurally unjust and periodically in crisis, whose only view of life is a reflection of that of the affluent.

I speak on behalf of women the world over, who suffer at the hands of a male-imposed system. We welcome suggestions from anywhere in the world on how to achieve the full development of Burkinabè women. In exchange, we can offer to share with all other countries the positive experience we have had with women who now participate at every level of the state apparatus and in all aspects of Burkina's social life. Women in struggle proclaim in unison with us that the slave who does not organize his own rebellion deserves no pity for his lot. He alone is responsible for his misfortune if he harbors illusions in the dubious assurance of a master's promise of freedom. Freedom can be won only through struggle and we call on all our sisters of all races to rise to the assault and fight to conquer their rights.

I speak on behalf of the mothers in our impoverished countries who watch their children die of malaria or diarrhea, ignorant of the fact that there are simple ways to save them. The science of the multinationals, however, keeps this knowledge from them, preferring instead to serve the cosmetics laboratories and provide plastic surgery to satisfy the whims of a few men and women whose charm is threatened by the excess of calories in their meals, the richness and regularity of which would make you — or rather us from the Sahel — dizzy. We have decided to adopt and popularize the simple measures recommended by the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

I speak, too, in the name of the child — the hungry child of the poor who furtively eyes the accumulation of abundance in the rich man's stores. The store is protected by a thick glass window; the window is protected by impenetrable bars; the bars are protected by a policeman in helmet and gloves, armed with a billy club and posted there by the father of another child who can come and serve himself, or rather be served, just because he has the credentials guaranteed by the system's capitalist norms.

I speak on behalf of the artists — poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, and actors — good men who see their art prostituted before the alchemy of show business conjuring tricks. I cry out in the name of the journalists reduced to silence or lies in order to avoid the harsh law of unemployment. I protest on behalf of the athletes of the entire world whose muscles are exploited by the political system or by modern-day slave merchants.

My country is the quintessence of all the misfortunes of the peoples, a painful synthesis of all of humanity's suffering, but also, and above all, a synthesis of the promise of its struggles. This is why I feel as one with the sick who anxiously survey the horizons of a science monopolized by arms merchants.

My heart goes out to all those affected by the destruction of nature and with the thirty million who will die each year, struck down by the formidable weapon called hunger.

As a military man, I cannot forget the soldier who must obey orders. His finger on the trigger, he knows that the bullet he will fire brings only the message of death.

I speak out in indignation thinking about the Palestinians whom an inhuman humanity has replaced with another people — a people only yesterday martyred at will. My thoughts reach out to this valiant Palestinian people, to the shattered families wandering across the world in search of refuge. Courageous, determined, stoic, and untiring, the

Palestinians remind every human conscience of the moral necessity and obligation to respect the rights of a people. The Palestinians, along with their Jewish brothers, oppose Zionism.

Side by side with my brother soldiers of Iran and Iraq who are dying in a fratricidal and suicidal war, I wish also to feel close to my comrades of Nicaragua, whose harbors are mined and whose villages are bombarded and who, despite everything, face their destiny with such courage and clear-sightedness. I suffer with all those of Latin America who labor under the grip of imperialism.

I wish to stand on the side of the peoples of Afghanistan and Ireland, Grenada and East Timor, all of whom are searching for a happiness inspired by their dignity and the laws of their own culture. I stand here in the name of all those who are seeking a truly world forum to make their voices heard and get a genuine hearing. Many have preceded me to speak at this podium and others will follow. But only some will make the real decisions. And yet we are officially all equals here.

Well, I will act as the spokesperson for all those who vainly seek a forum in this world from which to make themselves heard. Yes, I wish to speak in the name of all the abandoned of the world, for "I am a man: nothing human is alien to me."

Our revolution in Burkina Faso embraces the misfortunes of all peoples. It draws on the totality of man's experiences since the first breath of humanity. We wish to be the heirs of all the revolutions of the world and of all the liberation struggles of the peoples of the Third World. Our eyes are on the profound upheavals that have transformed the world. We draw the lessons of the American revolution, its triumph over colonial domination and the consequences of its victory. We take as our own the pledge of noninterference in each other's affairs affirmed by the Europeans and the Americans. Just as Monroe proclaimed "America to the Americans" in 1823, we echo this today by saying "Africa to the Africans," "Burkina Faso to the Burkinabè."

The French revolution of 1789, which overturned the foundations of absolutism, taught us the intimate connection between the rights of man and the rights of peoples to liberty. The great October [Russian] revolution of 1917 transformed the world, brought victory to the proletariat, shook the foundations of capitalism, and made possible the realization of the Paris Commune's dreams of justice.

We are open to all the winds of the will of the peoples and their revolutions, and we study some of the terrible failures that have given rise to tragic violations of human rights. We take from each

revolution only its kernel of purity, which forbids us to become slaves to the reality of others even where, in terms of ideology, we find we have common interests.

Mr. President:

The sham must end. The New International Economic Order for which we are fighting and will continue to fight can be won only if we succeed in bringing to ruin the existing order that ignores us, if we take our rightful place in the political organization of the world, and if, considering our importance in the world, we obtain the right to be part of the discussions and decisions concerning the mechanisms that govern trade, the economy, and the monetary system on a world scale.

The New International Economic Order simply takes its place alongside all the other rights of the people, such as the right to independence, self-determination in government forms and structures, the right to development, etc. Like all other rights of the people, it must be won in struggle and by the struggle of the peoples. It will never be the result of some big power's generosity.

I continue to have unshakable confidence — a confidence shared by the immense community of Nonaligned countries — that, under the blows of our peoples' cries of distress, our group will maintain its cohesion, strengthen its collective bargaining power, find allies among all nations, and begin, together with those who can still hear us, to organize a genuinely new international system of economic relations.

Mr. President:

I agreed to speak before this illustrious assembly because, despite all the criticism of the United Nations by some of its bigger members, it still remains an ideal forum for our demands — an indispensable place of legitimacy for all countries without voice.

This is what our Secretary General [Javier Pérez de Cuéllar] so correctly expressed when he wrote:

“The United Nations is unique in that it reflects the aspirations and frustrations of numerous countries and groupings around the world. One of its great merits is that all nations, including those that are weak, oppressed and victims of injustice” — he is talking about us — “can, even when they are facing the harsh reality of power, come and find a tribune to be heard. Though a just cause may meet with misfortune or indifference, it can nevertheless find an echo in the United Nations. This characteristic of our organization has not always been appreciated, but it is nonetheless essential.” There can be no better definition of the meaning and significance of our organization.

Thus it is a pressing necessity for each one of us to work to consolidate the foundations of our organization, giving it the necessary means to act. We thus take up the proposals made along these lines by the Secretary General so that we can help our organization out of its numerous impasses so carefully fostered by the big powers to discredit it in the eyes of public opinion.

Mr. President:

Given the merits, however limited, of our organization, I can only rejoice at the addition of new members. In this spirit, the Burkinabè delegation welcomes the admittance of our 159th member, Brunei Darussalam.

Because of the folly of those into whose hands the leadership of the world, by quirk of fate, has fallen, the Movement of Nonaligned Countries — of which I hope Brunei Darussalam will soon become a member — has the obligation to consider the fight for disarmament a permanent goal of its struggles, an essential precondition for our right to development.

In our opinion, we need a serious study that takes into account all of the elements that have led to the calamities that have befallen the world. In this regard, President Fidel Castro expressed our point of view admirably in 1979 at the opening of the Sixth Summit Conference of Nonaligned Countries when he declared, “Three hundred billion dollars is enough to build 600,000 schools a year with a capacity of 400 million children; or 60 million comfortable homes with a capacity of 300 million people; or 50,000 hospitals with 18 million beds; or 20,000 factories to provide employment for more than 20 million workers; or make possible the irrigation of 150 million hectares of land, which with an adequate technical level could provide food for a billion people.”³ If we multiply these figures by ten — and I am sure this would fall well short of today’s reality — we will see what humanity squanders every year in the military arena in opposition to peace.

One can easily see why the masses’ indignation rapidly becomes rebellion against the crumbs thrown their way in the insulting form of aid — an aid often tied to frankly contemptible conditions. One can understand why our struggle for development demands that we be tireless fighters for peace.

We hereby swear to fight to ease tensions and introduce into international relations principles worthy of a civilized way of life and extend them to all regions of the world. This means that we can no longer engage in passive phrasemongering. We reiterate our determination to be active proponents of peace; to take our place in the fight

for disarmament; and finally to act as a decisive factor in international politics, free from the control of any of the big powers, whatever the latter's plans may be.

The quest for peace goes hand in hand with the firm application of the right of countries to independence, of peoples to liberation, and of nations to self-determination. On this score the most pitiful and appalling — yes, appalling — prize is awarded to a small country in the Middle East, Israel, for its arrogance, insolence, and incredible obstinacy. Israel, protected by the despicable complicity of its powerful protector the United States, has defied the international community for twenty years. Scorning history, which only yesterday relegated Jews wholesale to the gas chambers, Israel now inflicts on others a suffering that was once its own. Israel, whose people we love for their courage and sacrifices of yesterday, must learn that peace for them cannot be achieved through military might financed from abroad. Israel must begin to learn how to become a nation like others and with others. For the present, from this rostrum, we affirm our militant and active solidarity with the men and women of this wonderful, combative Palestinian people, for we know that no suffering endures forever.

Mr. President:

In analyzing the economic and political situation in Africa, we cannot fail to stress the deep concerns we have with regard to the dangerous challenges to the rights of peoples. Certain countries, sure of their alliances, openly scorn international ethics. Of course, we are right to hail the decision to withdraw foreign troops from Chad. Chad can now seek ways to end this fratricidal war free from outside interference and finally allow its people, who have wept for so many years, to dry their tears.

However, despite some progress registered here and there by African peoples in their struggle for economic emancipation, our continent continues to reflect the basic fact of conflict between major powers. We continue to bear the brunt of the intolerable and seemingly endless tribulations of the modern world. For this reason, we believe that the fate meted out to the people of Western Sahara by the Kingdom of Morocco is intolerable, and we condemn it unconditionally. Morocco is using delaying tactics to postpone the inevitable day of reckoning that will be imposed on it by the will of the Sahraoui people. It is clear to me, after having personally visited the regions liberated by the Sahraoui people, that nothing will ever again be able to impede their march toward the total liberation of their country under the militant and clear-sighted leadership of the Polisario Front.

Mr. President:

I will not say a great deal on the question of Mayotte and the islands of the Malagasy archipelago. Some things are obvious, and when the principles are clear there is no need to elaborate on them. Mayotte belongs to the Comoros; the islands of the archipelago belong to Madagascar.⁴

In Latin America, we salute the Contadora Group's initiative, which marks a positive step in the search for a just solution to the explosive situation there. Comdr. Daniel Ortega, on behalf of the revolutionary people of Nicaragua, made some concrete proposals here and posed some fundamental questions to the appropriate people. We expect to see peace in his country and in all of Central America on October 15 and thereafter.⁵ We take world public opinion as our witness.

Just as we condemned foreign aggression against the island of Grenada, we condemn all outside intervention. For this reason we cannot remain silent about foreign military intervention in Afghanistan.

There is one particular question of such gravity that it demands of each one of us a frank and firm answer. As you might imagine, this is the question of South Africa. The incredible contempt that country has for all the nations of the world, including those who support its system of terrorism aimed at physically liquidating its black majority, and the scorn with which it greets all of our resolutions are among the most overbearing concerns of the contemporary world.

But the most tragic thing is not that South Africa stands accused by the international community because of its apartheid laws, nor that it continues illegally to keep Namibia under the racist boot of colonialism and subject its neighbors to highway robbery with impunity. No, the most despicable and humiliating thing bearing down on the human conscience is that it has managed to make a banality out of the misery of millions of human beings who have nothing but their chests and the heroism of their bare hands with which to defend themselves. Certain that it can count on the complicity of the big powers, including the active involvement of some of them, as well as the criminal collaboration of some of Africa's pitiful leaders, the white minority mocks the feelings of peoples across the globe who find intolerable the savagery of the methods it uses in South Africa.

There was a time when international brigades would have been formed to defend the honor of nations whose dignity is thus assaulted. Today, despite the festering wounds we have all sustained, we vote resolutions whose only power, we are told, is to bring to its

senses this nation of pirates that is capable of “destroying a smile as the hail kills flowers.”

Mr. President:

We will soon be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the emancipation of slaves by the British Empire. My delegation supports the proposal made by the countries of Antigua and Barbados to commemorate energetically this event that has such important significance for African countries and for all blacks. In our opinion, everything that is done, said, or organized around the world as part of the commemorative ceremonies should emphasize the terrible price exacted from Africa and blacks for the development of human civilization. This price was paid without receiving anything in return. This no doubt explains the tragedy we are witnessing today on our continent. Ours is the blood that nourished the rise of capitalism, thereby ensuring our current state of dependence and consolidating our underdevelopment. The truth can no longer be concealed by doctoring numbers. For every black brought to the plantations at least five others died or were mutilated. I leave aside here the devastation of our continent and its consequences.

Mr. President:

If, thanks to you and with the help of our Secretary General, the world can be convinced of this truth on this anniversary, it will then understand why, with every fiber of our bodies, we want peace between nations and why we demand and claim our absolute right to equality in development by means of the organization and redistribution of human resources.

Of all the human races, we belong to those who have suffered the most. We Burkinabè have thus sworn never again to accept the smallest injustice in even the smallest corner of the earth. It is our memory of this suffering that places us side by side with the Palestine Liberation Organization against the armed bands of Israel and makes us support the African National Congress and the South West Africa People's Organisation, while finding intolerable the presence, on South African soil, of men who destroy the world in the name of being white. It is this memory, too, that causes us to have deep faith in the common duty, task, and hopes of the United Nations.

We demand that the campaign for the liberation of Nelson Mandela be intensified throughout the world so that he can be present here with us at the next session of the UN General Assembly, a testimony to the triumph of our collective pride; that, in memory of our suffering and by way of a collective pardon to all, we establish an international prize of human reconciliation awarded to those who

through their research have truly contributed to the defense of human rights; and that space research budgets be cut by 1 percent and the funds be devoted to health research, aimed at reestablishing the balance in our environment that has been upset by these ecologically poisonous fireworks.

We also propose that the structures of the UN be changed to put an end to the scandal surrounding the right to veto. It is true that the most diabolical effects of its abuse have been offset by the vigilance of certain of those who hold this right. Nothing, however, can justify such a right — neither the size of the country that has it nor the wealth that country might possess.

There are those who defend such iniquity with the argument that it is justified by the price paid during the last world war. Let those countries who assert this right be aware that we, too, had an uncle or a father who, just like thousands of other innocent people, was torn from the Third World to defend rights flouted by Hitler's hordes. Our flesh, too, bears the scars of Nazi bullets. Let there be an end to the arrogance of the big powers who miss no opportunity to put the rights of the people in question. Africa's absence from the club of those who have the right to veto is unjust and should be ended.

Finally, my delegation would not have done its duty if it failed to demand Israel's suspension and the outright expulsion of South Africa from our organization. When, with the benefit of time, these countries have carried out the transformations that will make them admissible to the international community, each of us, and Burkina Faso will be the first, should welcome them with kindness and guide their first steps.

We reaffirm our confidence in the United Nations. We are grateful for the work carried out by its agencies in Burkina Faso and for their presence at our side as we live through such difficult times. We are also grateful to the members of the Security Council for having permitted us to preside over the work of the council twice this year. We can only hope that this council will adopt and apply the principle of struggle against the extermination of thirty million human beings every year from famine, which today wreaks more destruction than nuclear war.

My faith and confidence in this organization brings me to thank our Secretary General, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, for his much appreciated visit where he was able to see firsthand the harsh realities of our existence and acquire an accurate picture of the aridness of the Sahel and the tragedy of the conquering desert.

I could not end without paying homage to the fine qualities of our

president [Paul Lusaka of Zambia] who, with the clear-sightedness that we know he has, will be able to lead the work of this Thirty-ninth Session.

Mr. President:

I have traveled thousands of kilometers. I came here to ask each one of you to unite in a common effort so that the arrogance of those who are wrong may end, so that the sad spectacle of children dying of hunger may vanish, so that ignorance may be wiped out, the legitimate revolt of the people be victorious, and the noise of war finally fall silent.

Let us struggle with a single will for the survival of humanity. Let us sing together with the great poet Novalis: "Soon the stars will revisit the earth they left during the age of obscurity, the sun will lay down its harsh specter and once again will become one star among many, all the races of the world will come together anew, after a long separation, orphaned families of yore will be reunited and each day will be a day of reunification and renewed embraces; then the inhabitants of olden times will return to the earth, in every tomb the extinguished cinders will be rekindled and everywhere the flames of life will burn again, old dwelling places will be rebuilt, the olden times will be born again and history will be the dream of the present stretching to infinity."

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you.

Notes

1. Negritude was a literary movement that began among French-language African and Caribbean writers living in Paris in the 1930s. The term was coined by Aimé Césaire of Martinique. The movement, formed as a protest against French rule and its policy of cultural assimilation, stressed the value and dignity of African cultural traditions. Césaire and Léopold Senghor of Senegal were two of its leading proponents.

African Personality was a concept of Kwame Nkrumah, which he counterposed to negritude. Nkrumah attributed unique qualities to African culture that gave Africans a predisposition toward socialism.

2. The Alma Ata principles were recommendations of the International Conference on Primary Health Care, held in Alma Ata, USSR, in 1978. The conference, sponsored by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), stressed proper nutrition, safe water, sanitation, maternal and child health care, immunization, and provision of essential drugs.

UNICEF's GOBI FFF Strategy is directed toward children and women in particular. Key components include treating victims of diarrhea-caused dehydration with an inexpensive solution of clean water, glucose, and salts; breastfeeding; immunization against the six major communicable diseases; and education.

3. The entire speech is published in Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro Speeches: Cuba's Internationalist Foreign Policy 1975-80* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981).

4. Three of the four Comoro Islands, located in the Indian Ocean near Mozambique, became independent from France in 1975. The fourth, Mayotte, remains a French colony.

The French-controlled islands of the Malagasy archipelago, located between Mozambique and Madagascar, are Ile Europa, Bassas da India, Ile Juan de Nova, and the Iles Glorieuses. They are administered from the island of Réunion, a French colony in the Indian Ocean on the east side of Madagascar, 1,000 miles away.

5. Ortega spoke to the General Assembly on October 2 and warned of an imminent escalation of the U.S.-organized mercenary war against Nicaragua that was to begin on October 15. According to Ortega, one of its main purposes was to prevent the upcoming November 4 presidential election in Nicaragua.

We Must Fight Against Imperialism Together

March 17, 1985

This interview was given by Sankara on March 17, 1985, in Ouagadougou to the newsmagazine Intercontinental Press and published in its April 29, 1985, issue. The interview was conducted by Ernest Harsch.

Ernest Harsch: What do you see as the revolution's greatest accomplishments since you took power in August 1983?

Thomas Sankara: Today, after a year and a half of revolution, we note that we have not succeeded in — at least we have not completed — carrying out the material transformations. Yet we can pride ourselves on having constructed schools, clinics, and dams, built roads, increased our farmland, and carried out reforestation. We can also take pride in having provided housing for the people. But this is not enough. Much more remains to be done.

The most important thing for us, however, is not what is lacking. Most important is the effort we have made to transform people's attitudes. With this transformation each one of us now feels that wielding power is his business, that the destiny of Burkina Faso is the business not just of certain people but of all Burkinabè. Everyone has something to say. Each one of us demands an accounting from the other. Never again will things be done as before. No longer will the wealth of our country belong to a minority. This wealth belongs to the majority, a majority that speaks its mind.

Perhaps some of the ways of doing things here have not been very pleasant. But that's natural. When people have been subjected to domination for many years and then one fine day they have the freedom to express themselves, naturally they go to extremes. We must understand that and have a certain indulgence. That's normal.

Thus, the most important aspect of our revolution is this transformation of our mentality. The rest will follow.

Harsch: What have been your greatest problems and difficulties?

Sankara: The greatest difficulty we have faced is the neocolonial spirit that exists in this country. We were colonized by a country, France, that left us with certain habits. For us, being successful in life, being happy, meant trying to live as they do in France, like the richest of the French. So we run into some constraints and obstacles to the changes that we want to carry out, namely, those people who will not accept even a minimum of social justice, but who wish to preserve all their privileges at the expense of others. Naturally, this means we have to wage a struggle.

Our first and fundamental fight was against the bourgeoisie. Then next we had to fight, above all, the petty bourgeoisie, which is very dangerous, very much inclined toward the bourgeoisie while at the same time also admiring the prestige of the revolutionaries. It wavers. We think that so long as this petty bourgeoisie is not massively involved in the revolution, we will have difficulties. It is this petty bourgeoisie that screams, poisons minds, and defames. Numerically it represents nothing. But since our society is a neocolonial society where the intellectual has the preponderant place, these people have a preponderant place in shaping opinions. The other difficulties, natural and otherwise, are not serious.

Our big difficulty after this is imperialism, which tries to dominate us from both inside and outside our country. Through its multinationals, its big capital, and its economic power, imperialism tries to control us by influencing our discussions and our national life. They create difficulties for us, such as trying to strangle us by imposing an economic blockade. At the same time, and hand in hand with this, they try to plot against us, against our internal security. We still have many struggles ahead of us to combat imperialism.

Harsch: Has imperialism's opposition been as severe as you expected, and how well do you think you have been able to resist it?

Sankara: I must tell you in all honesty that as a revolutionary I understood what imperialism was in theoretical terms. But once in power, I discovered other aspects of imperialism that I had not known. I have learned, and I think that there are still other aspects to discover. There is quite a difference between theory and practice.

I've seen in practice that imperialism is a monster — with claws, horns, and fangs that bite — that has venom and is merciless. A speech isn't enough to make it tremble. No. It's determined. Imperialism has no conscience. It has no heart. Fortunately, the more that we have discovered how dangerous an enemy imperialism is, the

more determined we have become to fight and beat it. And each time we find fresh forces ready to stand up to it.

Harsch: How has the organization and training of the militia and the development of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution been going?

Sankara: We are satisfied with them. Of course, at the beginning there were many people who became involved without knowing what sacrifices would be demanded of them. When they learned that it would be a little difficult, they began to pull back. We think this is natural. The revolution advances like a bus, with its difficulties. When it changes speed, there are some who fall off. That's natural. But now consciousness has won out over euphoria. This consciousness has allowed us to make a great leap forward.

Harsch: It's obvious here that the youth are with the revolution. What success have you had in drawing the older members of society behind what you are trying to do?

Sankara: We have scored some successes with elders too, because they recognize that the revolution has brought them things they had never dared dream of. To be sure, they often take fright at the methods and language of the revolution and think that they no longer have the energy and strength to keep up. But we are in the process of setting up a framework for those elders who want to participate in the revolution, in their own way and at their own pace, while still entrusting the political and ideological leadership to us. We're in the process of establishing an organization of elders that will be very useful to us. In fact there are elders who are already doing important work.

Harsch: Last week, you had a women's week here, culminating in International Women's Day, March 8. What did that indicate about the extent of women's involvement in the revolutionary process?

Sankara: Under previous regimes, women here were organized into folkloric groups. They sewed uniforms, sang, and danced, but didn't really know where they were going. Even after August 4, 1983, we faced problems in mobilizing women because of their subjectivity. The women were very subjective and didn't yet see what the revolution could bring them and what role they themselves had to play in it.

We have given them the time to bring their revolutionary role to fruition. This time was valuable, because now women use a totally

different language in many of their meetings and discussions. They feel that their role is not just to make demands but above all to lay out the basis of their oppression and domination clearly and objectively. They are managing to do this better and better. They are becoming capable of defining who their enemies are within the country, such as men — the male — but also enemies like imperialism and the system of culture that it brought with it. There is also yesterday's feudal system, which existed here even before the advent of colonialism. Women have now managed to understand all these things. They will therefore be able to fight against them.

A positive thing we have noted with women is that they are now ready to liberate themselves. You cannot free a slave who is not conscious of being a slave. We have also noticed that women in Burkina have now become conscious that the work they do will be for their own liberation and will be their contribution to the revolution. They have understood that the revolution and only the revolution can liberate them. It was this qualitative change that was lacking. Bringing together thousands and thousands of women was an easy thing that we could do at any time. But we understood at a certain point that this was not really useful. It was unproductive, so we stopped doing it. We have now come back to basics in a very modest way and this is how we were able to organize this women's week, which was very positive.

Harsch: How do you think the agrarian reform and the formation of CDRs in the villages will change social relations in the countryside, particularly the role of the chiefs?

Sankara: The traditional form of organization in the countryside is being attacked and that's natural. It is a feudal system that doesn't allow for development and that denies the masses even a minimum of social justice or enlightenment. This feudal system functioned so that some people, simply through the circumstances of their birth, could control considerable amounts of land — many hectares, many square kilometers. They distributed the land as they saw fit. Others could only cultivate the land and had to pay them. The reign of these people is coming to an end. In certain regions it is already over.

We know that this breakdown of the feudal system in our countryside will be beneficial, since from now on the peasant who has a piece of land will have the security to work it. He will know the land is entrusted to him. The land today belongs to the Burkinabè state and no longer to an individual, but the Burkinabè state can entrust the use, management, and cultivation of the land to those who work it.¹

The peasants will be encouraged to improve the land they cultivate, rather than as under the old system when you could use organic fertilizers or manure to enrich the soil and then one or two years later, just when the land begins to become fertile, the owner would come and tell you to leave. The development of our agriculture requires security for the toilers who cultivate it. The feudal form of organization must give way to new structures, through which the people find expression.

Harsch: Several weeks ago, *Le Monde* and *Jeune Afrique*, both published in Paris, reported on a statement by several trade union leaders criticizing the government's policies. They presented it as a major split between the National Council of the Revolution and the working class. Is that the case? Is the conflict with the working class, or is it just with these trade union officials?

Sankara: It's basically a problem with the leadership of these organizations, which are petty-bourgeois leaderships. As petty bourgeois, they thought that the revolution had swept aside the reactionary and bourgeois classes in order to place them in power. So naturally we have conflicts.

The worker, however, is completely satisfied with the decisions we are making. When we said that rents no longer had to be paid,² the worker benefited. But the union leaders, who had houses to rent out, could not be happy with this. You must understand this. It's very important.

Besides, you posed the question very well. Is this a conflict with the workers, the working class, or with the leadership? It's a conflict with the leadership, not with the workers. The proof: have you seen any strikes here? There are no strikes. These same workers are in both the CDRs and the unions. It's only the leaderships that are not at all pleased. And that's natural. It's because of their petty-bourgeois outlook.

The revolution in Africa faces this great danger: every time, it is initiated by the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie is generally made up of intellectuals. At the beginning of the revolution the big bourgeoisie is attacked. That's easy. They are the very wealthy, the big capitalists — big, fat, and gross — with big cars, big houses, many women, and so on. People know who they are and go after them. But after one, two, or three years, it's necessary to take on the petty bourgeoisie. And when the petty bourgeoisie is attacked, we attack the very leadership of the revolution.

The unions have contributed a great deal to the revolution here.

They have contributed to our country's popular struggles. But they did so as petty bourgeois who dreamed about sweeping away the bourgeoisie in order to take its place. And now the revolution has happened and they are afraid of it.

You see, that's why in certain African countries these people talk of revolution, revolution, revolution. But they have gold chains and fine ties. They are always in France buying expensive clothes and big cars. They have bank accounts, etc. Yet they talk about revolution.

Why is this? When they've finished attacking the big bourgeoisie and want to go after the petty bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie bares its claws and they take fright. So what do they do? They give big salaries to the military, government ministers, and the praetorian guard. All the top union leaders and others are given prestigious posts. They're named ministers, prime minister, coordinator of this or that. They're happy. They keep quiet. The ministers themselves begin to become businessmen — hucksters. They send their children to school in Europe or the United States. If you take the situation under [former president of Guinea] Sékou Touré, who talked about revolution — the largest number of French-speakers in the United States were Guineans. Harvard, Cambridge, in England, too. Everywhere. That's the petty bourgeoisie.

Every revolution that starts out with the petty bourgeoisie comes to a crossroads where it must choose: To go after the petty bourgeoisie and be able to keep the revolution radical — which causes you many difficulties; or to coddle the petty bourgeoisie — and you have no difficulties. But then you also no longer have a revolution. You have a pseudorevolution.

That's why, while the petty bourgeoisie here is against reducing their salaries, it is in favor of levying taxes on the peasants in the countryside and increasing their own salaries. They make 200,000 CFA francs a month and think their salaries should be increased by 5,000, 10,000, 15,000, or 20,000 francs. If we raise their salaries, they will organize support marches. If we lower them, they protest. They don't see the benefits for the peasant. They can't see it. This is why we say the petty bourgeoisie is constantly torn between two interests. It has two books. On the one hand Karl Marx's *Capital*, on the other a checkbook. It wavers: Che Guevara or Onassis? They have to choose.

Harsch: This problem you have just discussed is obviously also reflected in the conflicts involving the different left-wing political organizations here. How do you see this problem being overcome?

Sankara: Each organization struggles and maintains itself through its influence and importance among the masses. Organizations must be allowed to continue like this and differentiate themselves in the eyes of the masses. And when the masses get to know all of them, then they will choose. They will strengthen certain organizations and fight against others. That's why a revolution can never be made with a handful of people who lock themselves in an office and declare: "I am from this organization. You should accord me such and such importance."

This is the problem we find in some countries. Take Chad, for example, with its political tendencies. When the leaders gather in an office for discussions, each one says they represent a tendency. They say, "Me too, me too." But if you leave them to the masses, the masses will eliminate those that should be eliminated and retain those that should be retained.

Our problem here is that this petty bourgeoisie, thanks to the relations it has with the foreign press, tries to create a big uproar. You will see that here, within the country, there is no problem. When you read *Le Monde* or *Jeune Afrique* or listen to the Voice of America or Radio France Internationale, you hear "Burkina Faso this, Burkina Faso that. . . ." You get the impression that things are not going so well in Burkina Faso. Yet things are going very well here. This happens because the petty bourgeoisie here has connections. They are intellectuals. They have traveled. They have connections in all countries and they can draw on that. Here in Burkina they have been exposed and there is no longer a problem. Some are even ready to discuss with us, such as Arba Diallo, the former minister of foreign affairs. He was in prison and he was released. They are ready to discuss with us because they no longer have any weight. The sole support they have is from abroad. It is the foreign press that writes articles against us every day. If we had a lot of money we could give it to a magazine to write articles supporting us. But we don't have money for that kind of thing.

Harsch: Are there any prospects for trying to unify the various groups that support the revolution?

Sankara: It's possible. We have confidence that it's possible. But this unification will be to the detriment of individuals and not of organizations, since in an anti-imperialist struggle, a revolutionary struggle, it is organizations that have a platform. Individuals may say no, since there is nothing in it for them. There are individuals who prefer to be number one in a village rather than number two in the

city. Since they don't wish to be number two in the city, they prefer to keep their organization to themselves and reject unification, even though the organization is for it. Such individuals will be systematically eliminated to make way for the organizations.

Harsch: When you visited the United States last October, you passed through Cuba on your way. In Cuba you received the José Martí Order. What do you think is the significance of the Cuban revolution?

Sankara: I consider the Cuban revolution to be a symbol of courage and determination. It's a great lesson. Cuba, a small agricultural country, without immense resources, except for some very limited ones, has been able to stand fast, despite direct and indirect pressure by the big United States. It's a great lesson. We know that Cuba did not resist alone. It needed the internationalist support of the Soviet Union to aid and strengthen it. But we also know that this support is not enough. That's why we look at the Cubans with admiration.

When I saw Fidel Castro, I told him, "It's already been twenty-five years, but you still look like a revolutionary who has just come down from the Sierra Maestra." We have a very great admiration for the Cuban revolution.

Of course, our two revolutions are not the same. The conditions are not the same either. But in terms of courage, determination, and the constant involvement of the people — the people, always the people — in what one does, Cuba provides very valuable lessons.

Harsch: It's important for U.S. working people to learn more about revolutionary struggles in other countries, such as here in Burkina. That's a first step toward solidarity. We have the same enemy — U.S. imperialism. The forms of our struggles may be different, but the enemy is the same. So, if workers become conscious of that, they will naturally feel solidarity with your struggle against imperialism here. And developing this kind of internationalist consciousness is also important for working people's understanding of who and what their enemy is at home.

Sankara: It's a problem of communication. The imperialism that we are fighting isn't an isolated thing. It's a system. As revolutionaries and from a dialectical point of view, we must understand that we, too, must have a system. You must counter a system with a system, an organization with an organization, not simply individuals full of goodwill, good sentiments, honesty, courage, and generosity.

The imperialist system, which is worldwide and not located sim-

ply in this or that country, must be fought with an entire system that we will fashion together. Consequently, we must get to know each other, understand each other, establish a platform, an area of understanding between us so as to be able to combat imperialism seriously and with a good chance of success.

That's why I agree with you on the need for communication and mutual understanding. I believe that you're a journalist. That's your job, and you will help in that. I also think this is the reason why — even though I'm very busy today and have many files on my desk — I am duty-bound to give you at least five minutes to explain to you what we are doing. As revolutionaries, we don't have the right to say that we're tired of explaining. We must never stop explaining. We also know that when the people understand, they cannot but follow us. In any case, we, the people, have no enemies when it comes to peoples. Our only enemies are the imperialist regimes and organizations.

Harsch: If you had a few minutes to address the working people of the United States, what would you say?

Sankara: We want the American working people, and the American people in general, to understand that the people of Burkina Faso are not the enemies of Americans. The people of Burkina Faso are a people who are proud of their identity and independence, and who jealously guard their independence, just as you Americans did when you fought for your independence under the slogan "America for the Americans." You didn't want any intervention by Europe. You fought against Britain for your independence. I think that's natural and that it's only just that we should have the same elementary right.

You should know that we are in solidarity with the Americans in their suffering. Even if you have greater material wealth than we, you have misery in your hearts, and we know, as you do, what is the cause of this misery. This misery is the ghettos of Harlem. It is also the fact that the American, whatever his wealth, lives like a pawn on a chessboard, who is moved around and manipulated. This misery is also the life of aggression and barbarism — the dehumanized and inhuman life — that was created in the United States because of the power of money, of capital.

We know, as you do, that it's imperialism that organizes and underlies all this. We must fight against it together. We appeal to the American people to understand us, to aid us in our struggle, just as we will also aid them. But let it never be said that we are the enemy of the American people. It's not true. We wish complete success to

the American people, all of whose struggles are our struggles.

Unfortunately, you are not told one-tenth of the truth about the realities of the world. We hope that the American people will not be a people subjected to insults around the world, by slogans on the walls of “Yankee go home.” The American people cannot be proud of that. A country, a people, cannot be proud of the fact that, wherever they go, other people look at them and see the CIA, attacks, and arms behind them. The American people are also a people capable of love, of solidarity, and sincere friendship.

We want to correct all this. We want to help you take your place — whether through your leaders or through yourselves, the people — on the condition that you accept our condemnation of the evils and causes of this general, worldwide distrust toward the American people.

Notes

1. On the first anniversary of the revolution, the National Council of the Revolution decreed the nationalization of all land and mineral wealth.

2. On December 31, 1984, the government decreed that no residential rent would have to be paid in 1985. A national housing organization was set up to ensure compliance with the decree. Commercial and industrial rents continued to be paid directly to the state.

Dare to Invent the Future

1985

The following are excerpts from a series of interviews conducted in Ouagadougou by Swiss journalist Jean-Philippe Rapp. They are translated from Sankara: Un nouveau pouvoir africain (Sankara: a new African power), by Jean Ziegler. The interview is copyright 1986 and used by permission of the publisher, Editions Pierre-Marcel Favre, of Lausanne, Switzerland.

Jean-Philippe Rapp: Isn't the decision to become head of state a decision taken under a very definite set of circumstances?

Thomas Sankara: There are events, moments in life, that are like an encounter, a rendezvous, with the people. To understand them you have to go back a long way into the past, the background, of each individual. You don't decide to become head of state. You decide to put an end to this or that form of harassment or vexation, this or that type of exploitation or domination. That's all.

It's a bit like someone who has suffered from a serious illness, malaria say, and then decides to devote all his energies to vaccine research — even if it means along the way that he has to become an eminent scientist in charge of a laboratory or the head of a top medical team.

I, myself, started out with a very clear conviction. You can fight back effectively only against things that you understand well, and your fight can't be successful unless you're convinced that it is just. You cannot wage a struggle as a pretext, a lever, to acquire power, because generally the mask cracks very fast. You don't get involved in a struggle alongside the masses in order to become head of state. You fight. Then the need to organize leads to needing someone for a given post.

Rapp: But why you?

Sankara: You have to be convinced that you are capable of fighting, that you are courageous enough to fight for yourself. But above

all you must have sufficient will to fight for others. You'll find many who are determined to wage a fight, and who know how to go about it. But they are only doing it for themselves and don't go too far.

Rapp: You think this is because of their origins?

Sankara: Yes. There are leaders who have natural roots, and then there are those who have artificially created them. By artificially I mean those leaders who were created by erecting a wall around themselves. Such people are definitely cut off from the popular masses. They can be generous to a point, but that doesn't make them revolutionaries. You'll run into officials at all levels who are unhappy because no one understands them, even though they've proven their commitment to their work. Though they're making honest sacrifices, no one understands what they're doing.

Some of the international aid volunteers who come here from Europe are a bit like this; they have the same kind of experience. They too are sincere, but their ignorance about Africa leads them to make mistakes, blunders, that are sometimes insignificant, but that become decisive in the future. So after a stay of several years they go home completely disgusted with Africa. Yet it's not for lack of a noble heart. It's just that they came here with a patronizing attitude. They were lesson givers.

Rapp: As far as you're concerned, you have to have lived the reality?

Sankara: Other leaders have had the chance to immerse themselves in the masses. It is from here that they draw the necessary energy. They know that by taking such and such a decision they will be able to solve such and such a problem and that the solution they've found is going to help thousands, even millions, of people. They have a perfect grasp of the question without having studied it in the sociology department. This changes your perception of things.

Rapp: But from what concrete personal experiences did you yourself discover these realities?

Sankara: There were several. For example, I remember a man I knew well. We were right in the middle of a period of drought. In order to avoid dying of famine, several families from his village collected up the little money they had left and gave him the job of going

to Ouagadougou to buy some food. He traveled into the capital by bicycle. On arrival, he had a brutal and painful encounter with the town. He stood in line after line to get what he needed, without success. He watched a good many people jump ahead of him to buy their millet just because they spoke French. Then, to make a bad situation worse, the man's bike was stolen along with all the money the villagers had entrusted to him.

In despair, he committed suicide. The people of Ouagadougou didn't lose any sleep over him. He was just another dead body. They dug a hole and threw him in like a dead weight they needed to get off their backs.

Ouagadougou went about its business with its usual zest — indifferent to, and even ignorant of, this drama. In the meantime, far away, dozens of people, whole families, awaited the happy return of this man who was to give them another lease on life, but who never came back. So we have to ask ourselves, do we have the right to turn our backs on people like this?

Rapp: This shocked you?

Sankara: Yes. I think about it often even today.

Rapp: But have you experienced inequality firsthand yourself or have you just observed its impact on other people?

Sankara: No, I've experienced it personally. When I was little I went to primary school in Gaoua. The school principal there was a European and his children had a bicycle. We other children dreamed about this bicycle for months and months. We woke up thinking about it; we drew pictures of it; we tried to suppress the longing that kept surging up inside us. We did just about everything to try to convince them to lend it to us. If the school principal's children wanted sand to build sand castles, we fetched them sand. If it was some other favor they wanted, we fell all over ourselves to do it, and all that just in the hope of having a ride — taking a ride, as we say here. We were all the same age, but there was nothing to be done.

One day, I realized that all our efforts were in vain. I grabbed the bike and said to myself: "Too bad, I'm going to treat myself to this pleasure no matter what the consequences."

Rapp: And what were the consequences?

Sankara: They arrested my father and threw him in prison. I was thrown out of school. My brothers and sisters didn't dare go back to the school. It was really terrifying. How could this possibly fail to

create profound feelings of injustice among children of the same age?

They put my father in prison another time, too, because one of my sisters had gathered some wild fruit by throwing stones up at them. Some of the stones fell on the roof of the principal's house. This disturbed his wife's siesta. I understood that after a wonderful, refreshing meal she wanted to rest, and it was irritating to be disturbed like this. But we needed to eat. They didn't stop at putting my father in prison. They issued a notice forbidding anyone to pick this fruit.

Rapp: Today, when you are with your father and he can see what's become of you and what you've embarked upon, what does he have to say to you?

Sankara: My father is a former soldier. He fought in the Second World War and was taken prisoner by the Germans. As such, it's his view that we haven't seen anything yet, that for them it was much worse. Let's say our discussions are more like confrontations. *[Laughter]*

Rapp: This brings us to the problem of the elders, who play an important role in traditional African society and who must have enormous difficulty understanding, and above all accepting, what is happening today.

Sankara: There are very many elders in Burkina, and we must always reserve a word for them. They are surprised that we mention them in different speeches. These elders have the feeling they are being excluded, and this is all the more frustrating given that, at our age, they displayed tremendous courage. Today, they're resting on their laurels, but we should still be fair by recognizing their qualities in the past, in order to draw on the energy they are able to inspire with just a simple word.

Rapp: But how are you thinking of integrating them?

Sankara: We have decided to set up a structure for this. It doesn't have a name yet, but we already know who will be in charge. Provisional committees are being formed in all the provinces, and there will soon be a national convention where the elders will establish a national office. Different structures and leadership bodies will lay out terms of participation.

Rapp: There is a real willingness to be open-minded?

Sankara: We are talking about Africa, a society where feudalism in the broadest sense of the word is very powerful. When the elder,

the patriarch, has spoken, everyone follows. So we think that just as young revolutionaries must combat young reactionaries, elderly reactionaries will be fought against by elderly revolutionaries. I'm sure there are ideological limits to this. But we can accept those ideological limits as long as the elders combat those who must be combated in their sector.

Rapp: Let's come back to your childhood. Do you have other memories that could help shed light on your character and explain certain aspects of your conduct?

Sankara: I went to high school in Bobo Dioulasso. My family lived in Gaoua and I knew no one when I arrived. As it happened, the day that classes were supposed to begin, we were told that, for reasons stemming from school management, the school would not be open until the following day. The boarding facilities were closed too, so we had to fend for ourselves for the night.

With my suitcase on my head — I was too little to carry it any other way — I wandered through Bobo, which was far too big a town for me. I got more and more tired, until finally I found myself in front of a bourgeois house. There were cars and a big dog in the front yard. I rang the bell. A gentleman came to the door and eyed me disdainfully. "What is a little boy like you doing at my door?" he asked. "I saw this house and said to myself that this is where I am going to spend the night," I told him. He let out a big sigh — he couldn't believe his ears! — and then took me in. He settled me in, gave me something to eat, and then explained that he had to go out because his wife was waiting in the maternity hospital. The next day, I took my things, said good-bye, and left.

One day, when I had become a government minister, I named someone to the post of general secretary in the Ministry of Information. I asked him if he remembered me and he said no. A month later, I asked him the same question and received the same answer. The day he left his post I called him in and said to him, "You used to work at the radio station in Bobo. You live in such and such a neighborhood and you have an Ami 6 car. You opened your door to me and fed me when I was just a little boy in high school."

"So it was you?" he asked. I told him that yes, it was me.

His name was Pierre Barry. When I left his house that day I swore to myself that I must do something one day for this man so he would know that his kindness had not been in vain. I searched for him. Fate was kind. We met later. Today, he is retired.

Rapp: Burkina Faso is a member of the United Nations Security Council. You yourself have addressed the UN General Assembly. What are your thoughts on this?

Sankara: If I hadn't gone to the UN, I would never have had this experience, so there was a good side to it. But to tell you the truth, you have to avoid becoming one of the rats in the UN corridors. Otherwise you can very quickly fall into international complicity, a kind of acquiescence that reduces the problems people face to a verbal and theoretical sparring match.

When you see people at the UN, you have the impression that these are serious people, but I don't enjoy being with them. I only felt it was necessary to go there at the beginning.

But, as you say, we were members of the Security Council. Our view is that if our role in the UN is not to be limited simply to filling our slot, we should have the courage to speak out on behalf of the peoples who put their confidence in us. Burkina Faso was elected with the votes of more than 104 countries. We think we should represent their interests, in particular those of the Nonaligned countries. There must be a constant, daily, courageous defense of their interests, as well as all other peoples in revolt, if the UN is not to become an echo chamber manipulated by a few powerful drummers.

Rapp: Under these circumstances, have you been pressured? Have there been threats to cut off certain aid?

Sankara: At the time, the U.S. ambassador, for example, attempted to pressure us in this way. It was in relation to Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Grenada, and several other questions. We explained to him the sincere friendship we feel for the American people, but told him that it was not in their interests to cause suffering in other countries. We even added that we were so sincere in our friendship that we could not solidarize with any empty, unfounded attack on the United States. I should add, for the sake of intellectual honesty, that the American ambassador backpedaled after our conversation and explained our position to his government.

Rapp: Were these pressures because you were a member of the Security Council?

Sankara: In reality there were all kinds of different pressures, in different forms, by different groups of people. But could we keep quiet when a big power assaults a small country or when one nation invades another? Our view was that we had a battle to wage there on behalf of all those who had put their trust in us and all those who

hadn't because they didn't yet know us well enough.

Rapp: Are you satisfied with the results?

Sankara: We took the positions we had to take. We have now become known by a good many people. We have also made ourselves a good many enemies. We attacked to the left and the right, to the East and the West. Everyone took a bit of a beating. Was it worth making so many enemies? Should we have opened so many fronts at once? I don't know.

Rapp: Given your situation, if a big power withdraws its aid, this could cause you serious problems. This would be true, for example, in the case of France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and other Western countries.

Sankara: It is precisely for this reason that we must fight against imperialism and its manifestations. From imperialism's point of view it is more important to dominate us culturally than militarily. Cultural domination is more flexible, more effective, and less costly. This is why we say that to overturn the regime in Burkina Faso you don't need to bring in heavily armed mercenaries. You just need to forbid the importation of champagne, lipstick, and nail polish.

Rapp: Yet these are not products often used by Burkinabè.

Sankara: Only the bourgeoisie is convinced they cannot live without them.

We have to work at decolonizing our mentality and achieving happiness within the limits of sacrifices we should be willing to make. We have to recondition our people to accept themselves as they are, to not be ashamed of their real situation, to be satisfied with it, to glory in it, even.

We must be consistent. We have not hesitated to turn down aid from the Soviet Union that, in our opinion, did not meet our expectations. We explained this to the Soviet representatives, and I think we understand each other. We have our dignity to protect.

Rapp: When you have a budget of 58 billion CFA francs and 12 billion are earmarked for the debt, can you really have a financial plan or strategy?

Sankara: Yes, by posing in a very simple and stark manner the choice between champagne and water. We make every effort to reject inequalities in allocations. So, what do we find? Out of a budget of 58 billion, 30,000 functionaries monopolize 30 billion, and that

leaves nothing for everyone else. This is not normal. If we want greater justice, every one of us must recognize the real situation of the masses and see the sacrifices that must be made so that justice can be done. Who are these 30,000 functionaries? People like me!

Take my case. Out of 1,000 children born the same year I was, half died in the first three months. I had the great fortune to escape death, just as I had the great fortune not to die later from one of the diseases here in Africa that knocked out more of those born that same year. I am one of the 16 children out of 100 who went to school. This is another extraordinary piece of luck. I'm one of 18 out of a 100 who managed to obtain a high school degree and one of the 300 from the entire country who were able to go abroad and continue their education and who, on coming home, were assured of a job. I'm one of those 2 soldiers out of 100 who, on the social level, have a stable, well-paid position, because I'm an officer in an army where this rank represents something. The number of people who have been this lucky amount to only 30,000 in a country of seven million inhabitants. And among us, we soak up more than 30 billion? This can't go on!

Rapp: Not to mention other advantages!

Sankara: In fact, it's those of us in town who set the tone, who explain to world public opinion what is running smoothly and what is not and how they should understand the situation here. We are the ones who talk about human rights, the drop in our buying power, a climate of terror. We forget that we've condemned thousands of children to death because we wouldn't agree to cutting our salaries just a tiny bit so that a little dispensary could be built.

We haven't stirred up international public opinion against the kind of scandal such deaths represent. We participate in the international complicity of men of good conscience: "I'll forgive you your mistakes if you forgive me mine. I'll keep quiet about your dirty deeds if you do the same, then we can all be clean together." It's a veritable gentlemen's agreement among men of good conscience.

Rapp: Being indignant about this is one thing. But what can be done about it?

Sankara: You have to dare to look reality in the face and take a whack at some of the long-standing privileges — so long-standing in fact that they seem to have become normal, unquestionable. Of course, you run the risk of being violently attacked in the media. But then no one will ever ask seven million voiceless peasants if

they are happy or not with a road, a little school, a dispensary, or a well.

Rapp: But what would you do without international aid and infrastructural development loans?

Sankara: In 1983, when we came to power, the state coffers were empty. The regime we overturned had negotiated and obtained a long-term loan from France of three billion CFA francs. After a certain amount of pushing and pulling, this loan was reassigned to us. This wasn't an easy task and I can assure you that since then no one has loaned us anything at all, not France, nor any other country. There is no aid in our budget.

Rapp: Under these circumstances, how do you avoid a budget deficit?

Sankara: We fill the hole by preventing it from appearing — that is, we don't allow a deficit. We've lowered salaries. State officials have lost up to one month's income. Government functionaries have had to give up some of their pay, which, as you can imagine, is never welcomed by anyone. These are the kinds of sacrifices we impose on members of the government, of whom we demand an extremely modest life-style. A minister who is a schoolteacher receives a schoolteacher's salary. The president who is a captain receives a captain's salary, nothing more.

Rapp: The power of example?

Sankara: Yes. Can you believe that in the past here they were talking about introducing a thirteenth and a fourteenth month of salary? At the same time, people were dying for lack of a tiny capsule of quinine.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, that Cartierism appeared in France aimed against those black potentates who buy themselves cars and build mansions with the goods their taxpayers produce.¹ Cartierism was very much a product of our own errors.

Did you know, too, that there were Burkinabè who got foreign-service pay — in their own country — and extra compensation for the hot sun! Others had salaries of 200,000-300,000 CFA francs just for running a union. And they demanded salary raises despite the colossal sums they were already receiving! We have had to demand sacrifices. This is the kind of change of mentality we're talking about. And we are nowhere near our limit. This is just one of many steps to come.

Rapp: Given such a situation, is it possible to foresee any kind of investment?

Sankara: By lowering salaries, by adopting more modest lifestyles, by better management of the funds we have, and by preventing their misappropriation, we have been able to generate some surplus that allows for modest investment. But this only bears witness to the need to continue along these lines.

I can give you figures if you want. We draw up our budget once a year, then every trimester we see where we are and compare. This will tell you how carefully we have to watch our pennies. In the first trimester of 1983, the budget — in which we had already been involved as members of the Council for the Salvation of the People, but did not have final say — showed a deficit of 695 million CFA francs. By the first trimester of 1984, we had reduced this to one million CFA francs, since we were able to direct it and implement it ourselves. In the first trimester of 1985 there was no deficit but instead a surplus of 1.095 billion CFA francs, and this is how it will continue.

Rapp: Yes, but at what price?

Sankara: We've tightened up in all areas. It's not allowed here to write on only one side of a sheet of paper. Our ministers travel economy-class and have an expense allowance of only 15,000 CFA francs per day. It's the same for me, except that as head of state I have the advantage of being provided for when I am received abroad.

Our minister of labor went to Geneva a little while ago for an international conference. As you yourself probably know so well, with his 15,000 CFA francs daily allowance there is no way he could expect to find accommodation in Geneva. He had to go to the other side of the border to France and share modest accommodations with his colleagues. This is nothing to be ashamed of. Maybe his living conditions enabled him to carry out his assignment even better than if he had been staying in a palace. This is just one example among many.

Rapp: A few months ago, *Sidwaya* carried a headline that read: "Had Lenin known what we are doing, he would have helped us." Does this reflect a certain disappointment with the Soviet Union and other countries?

Sankara: Given the risks we are taking — for we are leading a genuine revolution here — and maybe we lack modesty, but given what we think we could represent for the whole of Africa, we don't understand this wait-and-see policy, this lack of interest, this lack of will to help us on the part of those who should most logically do so.

From the point of view of ideological leanings, they are in the same camp as we are.

We have even greater difficulty understanding it given that in Burkina we can be choked to death for lack of five million CFA francs. Several times we have almost had to close down normal operations and put people out of a job for lack of this kind of a sum. The consequences would have been strikes, protests, and maybe even the total downfall of our regime, if the discontent had been exploited by more cunning people. And once this happens, "Once bitten, twice shy," as they say! Horrendous measures would have been taken to make sure that there would never be another regime like ours.

Rapp: So the article really did express disappointment?

Sankara: The article in *Sidwaya* did, yes. But on the other hand, I don't think we should ask others to sacrifice for us to the point of ignoring their own problems, even if theirs are not comparable to ours. The unhappiness of the person in your country who finds that the quality of the wine is poor is as valid as the sadness of the Burkinabè here who has no water to drink.

Elsewhere in the world, the population is discontented because the government hasn't created a third or a fourth, or a twenty-fifth, television channel. This is no reason for us to ask you to mark time, to wait for those of us who don't even have one. Other countries have their burdens to carry too.

And then we should also add that we are the ones who are making our revolution. So much the better or worse for us, we must accept the consequences. After all, no one asked us to make it! We could have mortgaged off the country and put it up for rent—someone would have paid. We are the ones who judged that all forms of outside control should be rejected. Now we have to pay the price.

Rapp: Learn how to shed the welfare mentality?

Sankara: Yes. We must do this. Had we not been colonized and therefore not had particular relations with France to begin with, how could we possibly think we had the right to expect something of France? Why? In Corrèze and Larzac, there are those who are still not happy. So we must do away with this mentality, even if, in the name of some form of internationalism, we would have liked the aid to go where it should.

But even there, we shouldn't forget that, unless you're a masochist or have suicidal tendencies, you don't help your enemy. You don't provide him with arms so that he can survive and make his influence

felt and convince those around him to follow his example. There are many, many people who are afraid that we will succeed. They come after us with all kinds of challenges.

Rapp: Isn't time working against you?

Sankara: Well, they give us less than a year, for example, before our coffers are empty — before we'll no longer be able to pay our functionaries and have to run to the International Monetary Fund or some other organization for help. But struggling along, for better or for worse, we pass through this storm and emerge on the other side with our heads high. Then they set another deadline by which time we will fail. But we hold our own through thick and thin. We are proving over the long run and in real life that there exist other game plans that can make it possible to bypass the classical methods of filling the coffers.

Rapp: But what more can the Burkinabè people do? Won't it backfire on you if you demand too many sacrifices?

Sankara: Not if you know how to set an example. We have set up a Revolutionary Solidarity Fund, to which thousands of Burkinabè have contributed. Their contributions represent a considerable effort aimed at relieving our people of the need to beg for food aid. The fund has allowed us to ward off the most urgent problems, in particular the problem of survival faced by the population of the Sahel region.

Rapp: A related question is that of the foreign debt. At the conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, the participants were quite divided on how to deal with the question of paying back this debt.

Sankara: As far as we were concerned we stated very clearly that the foreign debt should not be repaid. To repay it would be unjust. It would be like paying war reparations two times over. Where does this debt come from, anyhow? It comes from needs imposed on us by other countries. Did we need to build mansions or tell doctors that they would receive a fabulous salary at the end of the month? Or foster the mentality of overpaid men among our officers? We were coerced into running up very heavy debts, and the economic installations made possible by these loans have not always run smoothly. We entered into some rather weighty financial commitments — often suggested, proposed, and organized by the same people who loaned us the money.

They have quite a system. First come the storm troopers, who know exactly what they are going to propose. Then they bring out the heavy artillery and the price keeps going up. These are wonderful investments for the investors. They don't put their money in banks at home because it doesn't pay. They have to create the need for capital elsewhere and make others pay.

For example, do we really need to smoke this or that brand of cigarette? They've convinced us that if you smoke their brand of cigarette you will be the most powerful man on earth, capable of seducing any woman you wish. So we've smoked their cigarettes and gotten cancer instead. The most privileged among us have gone to Europe to be treated. And all to give a boost to your tobacco market.

Rapp: But does refusing to pay the debt make any sense if only one or two countries do it?

Sankara: The pressure to pay the debt doesn't come from the isolated usury of a single bank. It's done by an entire, organized system, so that in the event of nonpayment, they can detain your planes at an airport or refuse to send you spare parts that are absolutely indispensable. So deciding not to pay requires united-front action. All the countries concerned should act together — on the condition, of course, that each one is open to looking critically at the way they manage these funds. Certain people who have contracted huge debts because of their own lavish personal expenses don't deserve our support. We said this clearly in the message we delivered to the OAU: "Either we resist collectively and refuse categorically to repay the debt or, if we are not able to do this, one by one, isolated, we will suffer death."

Rapp: But this point of view was not unanimous?

Sankara: Though everyone understands the logic behind such a legitimate refusal to pay, each one thinks he's smarter, more cunning than the other. A particular government will skirt the need for collective action to go and see the moneylenders. This country is then immediately portrayed as the best organized, the most modern, the one that best knows how to respect written agreements. The moneylenders then make more loans to this country, accompanied by further conditions. When the discontent spills out into the streets, they suggest sending in the thugs to break those who won't fall into line — and to put someone of their choice on the throne.

Rapp: Aren't you afraid of a violent public reaction against your internal economic measures?

Sankara: The general support we're finding for measures that are not very popular shows the nature of our revolution. It is a revolution directed not against other countries or peoples, but rather aimed at restoring the dignity of the Burkinabè people, aimed at allowing the masses to achieve happiness as defined by their own criteria.

In other countries happiness and development is defined by ratios — so many hundred pounds of steel per inhabitant, so many tons of cement, telephone lines, etc. In Burkina we have different values. We are not in the least bit embarrassed to say that we are a poor country. Within international organizations we are not at all afraid to get up and speak and to block discussions in order to gain a reduction of one or two dollars in the dues or contributions countries must pay. We know that this irritates a good many delegations that are capable of throwing thousands, if not millions, of dollars out the window.

And when we receive a foreign ambassador who has come to present his credentials, we no longer do so in this presidential office. We take him out into the bush, with the peasants. He travels on our bumpy roads and endures the dust and thirst. After all this we can receive him, explaining to him, "Mr. Ambassador, your excellency, you have just seen Burkina Faso as it really is. These are the people you must deal with, not those of us who work in soundproof offices."

Burkina has a wise and experienced people capable of shaping a certain way of life. While elsewhere people die from being too well-nourished, here we die from lack of nourishment. Between these two extremes there is a way of life to be discovered if each of us meets the other halfway.

Rapp: One other factor that should be taken into account is the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). According to the census, there are some 600 such organizations in Burkina, 400 of French origin. How do you explain this growth?

Sankara: I think these organizations have both a good and a bad side. Above all they reflect the failure of state-to-state relations, so that people are obliged to find other channels for contact and dialogue. Even though there is a Ministry of Cooperation and a Ministry of Foreign Relations they look to other means. This indicates politically that these ministries are nonfunctional.

Of course we know there are nongovernmental organizations that serve as spy agencies for imperialism. We would be totally naive or blind to reality if we thought otherwise. But this is not the case with all of them. Many are organizations of men and women who think that this is the ideal way for them to express themselves and make a

contribution. They've heard about the suffering in different countries and feel ill at ease under the burden of their luxury and calories. They feel the need to do something about it, and that's good.

Rapp: But couldn't this cause chaos that can't be set straight simply by good will?

Sankara: We've said to ourselves here that the NGOs exist, so we must organize them. If we don't, there could be a much more dangerous situation. Before, these organizations were established according to the country's electoral map. If there's a man of political importance in a certain electoral stronghold, that's where the wells will be dug, even if it means digging a well every twenty-five centimeters. Elsewhere, where there is a real need, nothing will be done because there's no citizen of our country in the public eye.

The work of the NGOs is also hampered in that the wells are built English- or German- or French-style, while the water is drunk Burkinabè-style. The NGOs refuse to share the necessary information, preferring to let each one repeat the same mistakes just so they can say, "You see, these people really don't understand anything."

Rapp: But aren't these organizations in a rather difficult and delicate position?

Sankara: The fact is, they've often made the mistake of not daring to assert themselves and tell a local leader, "Look, sir, we have come for such and such a precise reason. If you agree, we're in business, otherwise we'll pack our bags and go elsewhere."

Their complacency has often become complicity. For many, the most important thing is to get some good press clippings to circulate in Europe so that they can say, "You see, my good people, we are over there saving souls. Give us your pennies, God will repay you." In reality they're just backing the policies of this or that deputy or senator who uses their work as proof of his widening influence.

Rapp: Do you think that they upset the local political scene?

Sankara: The main thing is that they haven't had the courage to confront those who act incorrectly. The result is that they arrive here and are told, "You've come from Europe, very good. You have money and you wish to help the country, bravo, this is necessary because people are starving. But you're going to need an office so why not rent mine. You'll need a national director since we very much want to assure some continuity — I have a cousin who is ready to do that. As for switchboard operator — I have another cousin, and as or-

derly there's my nephew." To make a long story short, he brings the whole village into it, right down to the second orderly.

You, of course, are quite satisfied since your work is talked about in France and Switzerland. He is happy because he can go to his village and say, "If you are smart and vote for me there will be powdered milk." The powdered milk arrives and everyone is in ecstasy over this sterling performance that produces such miracles.

Rapp: But how do you guard against such situations?

Sankara: You have to wage a battle. This is why we've created an office for overseeing nongovernmental organizations. We don't intend to stop them from existing or functioning normally. They need a certain flexibility given the nature of their funds and their particular work methods. But we must make sure that they all take advantage of the accomplishments of those who came before them. We must also indicate the areas where they can be most effective and useful, as well as how to go about their work.

Rapp: Under what conditions does your government accept international aid?

Sankara: We do so when the aid offered respects our independence and our dignity. We refuse aid designed to buy off consciences and that only provides benefits for the leaders. If conditions are set designed to facilitate our purchasing your products, or to enable certain of us to open up bank accounts in your country, it will be turned down.

Rapp: Food is a dramatic problem in your country. Fifty percent of your children are victims of malnutrition and the average caloric intake is 1,875 per day, or only 79 percent of the recommended caloric intake. What can be done about this?

Sankara: Hunger has been, in fact, a cyclical problem for us for many years now. This is a reflection of our lack of organization, as well as lack of concern for the rural population. The problem also stems from a level of production that is inadequate because our soil is less and less fertile, population growth, and the temperamental and rare occurrence of our rains. We should add speculation to this list. We are confronting a combination of physical and sociopolitical problems that must be resolved simultaneously. We expect to take a number of technical and political measures to transform our agricultural production from a chance phenomenon into a source of wealth. We aim to go from food stability to self-sufficiency and one day to

become a great food-producing power.

Rapp: This is an ambitious program. How do you intend to carry it out?

Sankara: We must first figure out how to interest the rural community and then organize it for production, providing technical and organizational assistance. I'll give you an example. The complete anarchy of our grain distribution was a joy for the speculators and misery for the consumers. We know of thousands and thousands of peasants who were obliged to give up their land to usurers and all types of capitalists during difficult times between harvests. These capitalists could then use this land for speculation at a later time. So we took measures to prevent this by nationalizing the land.

Rapp: More than 90 percent of Burkina's population lives on the land. Given the extremely difficult conditions — poor soil, shortage of agricultural land, lack of watering places — what is your plan for rural development?

Sankara: We need to solve a series of different problems. First, we must master the water problem. We are currently constructing a number of small dams to retain water. But we must also master the different aspects of production. We need to create opportunities that will serve as incentives, as well as an agro-food industry capable of absorbing and preserving the produce. We also need better distribution so that seasonal and geographic shortages can be avoided. And finally, we see no reason why we shouldn't increase our exports to other markets.

We are less open to big industrial installations since automation eliminates jobs and requires the use of substantial amounts of capital, which we do not have. There is also the problem of maintaining this technology. A single missing part can mean dispatching a plane to Europe because the spare part can be obtained only there.

Rapp: So you anticipate an increase in food production?

Sankara: In terms of citrus fruits, market gardening, and herding, Burkina has possibilities that could bring very good results if we apply the know-how of those who have already thrown themselves into this kind of work elsewhere. We are not opposed to private enterprise as long as it does not infringe upon our honor, dignity, and sovereignty. We see no reason why people from overseas should not come and join with Burkinabè in developing the country, either in the private or public sector.

Rapp: At what pace?

Sankara: At our pace. We much prefer small installations, part way between industrial and craft production — workshops that employ labor with little training. Given their small size, they can be set up close to the production zones. We prefer old-time methods to new electronic gadgetry.

Rapp: You cultivate green beans, though this is a vegetable grown for export and very much at the whim of the international market.

Sankara: Every cloud has a silver lining. Green beans do cause us problems, it's true. But this has the merit of laying bare the reality of the capitalist world and exposing how those abroad view our revolution. It has enabled us to show clearly who these different pressure groups are who have decided to keep Burkina Faso in the clutches of dependency, tied to a certain type of exports.

Rapp: Can you give us some concrete examples?

Sankara: The green bean is grown in the Kougassi region and has been for a long time. It grows well and has been shipped out steadily to Europe, to France in particular. This has always been done, of course, in collaboration with the airline companies: the Union de Transport Aérien, a French-owned company, and Air Afrique, an African multinational essentially controlled by France. Oddly enough, in 1984 we noticed that despite a mediocre rainy season it had been a splendid season for the green bean. Well, these same airline companies refused to ship them.

The green bean is quite fragile. Every day 30 or so tons of beans arrived in Ouagadougou yet only 20 tons at maximum were shipped out. As a result, 400 tons of beans had begun to rot at the airport in less than a week, since we have no facilities for stockpiling and preserving produce. The airline companies told us their services had been purchased for other flights. We think that if cooperation is to exist between ourselves and these companies, especially with Air Afrique, of which we, as a sovereign state, are part, some sacrifices should be made. For example, some of the pleasure flights could have been canceled in order to safeguard the income of these poor peasants who had sweated blood to produce the beans, and who really proved their capacities in doing so.

And another thing. When our beans arrive in Europe they are immediately classified as inferior produce. But we know that they are later repackaged and put back on the market under a different label.

This is second-rate extortion. We can't bring them home again, so we have to sell them off at any price.

Rapp: Do you think there are political reasons behind this kind of thing?

Sankara: Yes, there is this too. A systematic boycott of exports from Burkina is organized in order to strangle us economically and cause problems between us and the growers.

Rapp: Is this the only example?

Sankara: No, by no means. Take the example of cattle. Burkina is a big exporter of livestock, yet we are currently having problems. They are refusing to buy our livestock, or else they place such unacceptable conditions on us that there is no way we can export it.

But the boycott is carried out in the area of imports, too, especially with regard to products we need urgently. Pressure is exerted to prevent us from importing the quantity of cement we need for general construction work. They know that by depriving us of materials, they can create a situation on our construction sites where numbers of workers will necessarily turn against us, thinking we are just demagogues.

We've sent out delegations to explain our situation and make our goodwill known to as many people as possible — to explain that our revolution is not aimed against other peoples, and that they have no reason to attack us. In the future, however, we will have to take this kind of provocative gesture as grounds for war.

Rapp: Are these kinds of blockades in retaliation for some of your international positions?

Sankara: This is correct. The positions we take don't always make people happy. But we are in a dilemma: On the one hand, we can remain silent on positions we believe to be correct, or consciously lie in order to enjoy the good graces of those who can help us, and please our delicate and powerful partners; or we tell the truth in the firm conviction that we are helping our own people and others.

When there is a strike under way in Europe, we are not the ones who have incited the workers to act against a particular industry. No. But we know that the workers are striking to defend their legitimate interests. We have to know how to provide solidarity, although there is no formal link between us.

Rapp: Another important concern in Burkina is the slow and

seemingly inescapable deterioration of the environment. What can you do to limit the damage?

Sankara: African societies are living through an abrupt rupture with their own culture, and we adapt badly to our new situation. Completely new economic approaches are required. Our populations are growing as well as our needs. In addition, our natural habitat and the spontaneous development to which we are accustomed, such as the natural expansion of the forests and crops, exists less and less. We have become great predators.

Take the annual consumption of wood for heating in Burkina, for example. If we were to place end to end the carts traditionally used to transport wood here, they would form a convoy the equivalent of 4.5 times the length of Africa from north to south. Can we allow such devastation to go on? But likewise, can we forbid people to continue cutting wood in this way, knowing that it is their main source of energy?

We are face to face with new needs and new demographic and sociological pressures, for which we have not yet found corresponding solutions. Deforestation has taken its toll elsewhere, too, but it has been possible to find substitutes for wood and replenish the trees. In Burkina, wood is our only source of energy. We have to constantly remind every individual of his duty to maintain and regenerate nature. The galloping and catastrophic spread of the desert, whose impact our people can see concretely, helps us in this.

Rapp: Explaining this, trying to convince people of it, is one thing. But what concrete measures can be applied?

Sankara: After a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, its causes and manifestations, we have come to the conclusion that there is only one solution: to take draconian measures to stop it. And I mean draconian, since they go against what people consider to be their most basic and immediate rights. However, we think that in the end our collective liberty will be preserved through these measures. So we've launched what we call the three battles.

First, we have forbidden the unplanned, anarchic cutting of wood. It must be cut within certain limits defined by specialists so that we can control it to some extent. In other words, just because you have wood a few meters from your dwelling doesn't mean you can cut it down. No. You will have to go as far as five kilometers away if that's where there is a sufficient quantity. To get the situation under control, we have forbidden the transport of wood except in specially painted vehicles that are clearly identifiable. This way, those who

work in this trade are limited in number and we can more easily regulate them and back them up with technical assistance.

Secondly, we have forbidden the random wandering of livestock, the second major cause, after man, of this uncontrolled destruction. Here too, I consider the measures we have had to take to be truly draconian, but we will not be able to solve the problem without imposing rigorous changes in people's mentalities. We have decided that any animal discovered grazing on crops may be slaughtered without further ado. This is to force our livestock breeders to adopt more rational rearing methods. At the moment, our method is anything but scientific. Breeders are quite content to have 5,000 head of cattle without worrying about how to feed them, to the point of allowing them to destroy other people's crops and devastate the forest, right down to its youngest shoots. Everyone is selfishly proud of his large number of cattle, which, in reality, do not represent much wealth, either in terms of weight, milk production, or capacity for work because they are so puny. Livestock herders must be made to ask themselves, "What are my real rearing costs and what, therefore, is the optimal number of livestock for me to get the best returns for the least expenditure?"

Rapp: But couldn't this solution entail quite a number of abuses?

Sankara: I must admit that there have been some very painful instances of livestock breeders who are unhappy because farmers have killed their animals. They have the impression that they've been tricked, because there are some cunning and wily farmers who purposely go and farm right next to the animals and wait for them with a club. Well, we have to go through this stage. I know my solution is not perfect, but even if this decision were only 60 percent right, I would stick by it. And as I see it, we're well above that percentage.

Rapp: So there are bans and constraints, but what about constructive measures?

Sankara: We have a program of reforestation, a positive act to regenerate nature. We have decreed that every village and town must have a wood grove. African tradition included a form of preservation of nature, a kind of socio-ecological tradition known as the sacred woods. A certain number of rituals, in particular initiation rituals, were carried out there. According to myth and animism, these woods supposedly possessed certain powers that protected them. As these values gave way to more modern and rational ones, as well as other forms of religion, the protection disappeared and the woods with it.

The protective shield afforded by the forest was destroyed so that, as you can imagine, the spread of the desert proceeded at an even more rapid pace.

This is one of the reasons why we've established wood groves. And though we haven't succeeded in investing them with the religious content of olden times, we try to give them an equivalent sentimental value. This is why all happy events in Burkina are marked by the planting of a tree, whether it be a baptism, a marriage, or some other ceremony.

On August 3 there was an awards ceremony. Those who received awards, after having been congratulated, went to plant a tree with friends and family. We will do the same thing every year. Even if only 15 percent of these trees survive it will be quite an accomplishment.

Rapp: The improved [mud] stoves are another means of cutting down on wood consumption?

Sankara: Over the past few years we have talked a great deal about these improved stoves. We've been subsidized by the hundreds of millions — billions — in order to promote their widespread use. First, we did basic research, then we applied our research, then, finally, came the stage of popularizing them. But we only began to make real progress once wood became scarce. Faced with an emergency, solutions had to be found to preserve this precious resource. Then the women finally became interested.

We have said that agricultural development in Burkina Faso can be carried out only by a harmonious marriage between livestock breeding and cultivation techniques. But it is impossible to integrate successful breeding as long as the breeder himself does not also think like a farmer.

Today, it's not only the milk, meat, manure, and bones that must be sold at an adequate price, but also the animals' capacity for work that is used all year long. Out of necessity, we are establishing a positive rhythm of production.

Rapp: You use symbols often in your speeches and in this interview, too.

Sankara: This is a pedagogic style, the product of our reality. As you will have noticed, we not only speak a great deal, we also give very long answers and, as you say, we are fond of symbols. This is because those listening to us are accustomed to the oral tradition of African civilization where speech progresses in a roundabout fashion.

I most often speak to peasants, so I let my spirit go out to this form of dialogue, debate, and exchange of views, though I very much admire the brilliance of those who adopt other styles. There are those who are able to give short, concise, and well-structured answers even without a written text. Their skill is a product of the kind of audiences they are used to addressing. When you speak to the university milieu you don't have to develop your point for hours on end as we need to do here. Ultimately, in Africa, we mistrust those who give journalistic answers. These are professional politicians, not men of the people.

Rapp: It seems that the period of grace following August 4, 1983, has come to an end. In your opinion, at what stage is the revolution?

Sankara: Interestingly enough, there's less exuberance today and yet it's easier to convince people. The phenomenon has lost some of its novelty and, up to a certain point, its captivating glamor. The revolution has become our normal way of life. Last time I saw you, in May 1984, I told you I was convinced that after the euphoric mobilization there would have to come a more conscious mobilization of the masses. This is the point we have reached.

Rapp: Without any difficulties or period of transition?

Sankara: There was a short transition period between the two phases, a period of drifting and doubts, despair even. During this period many people said, "You see, now that they've finished with their pompous and demagogic speeches, these people are proving incapable of leading our country forward." At the time every decision we tried to take ran up against hostility, whether organized and conscious or not. But fortunately for us this period passed quite quickly and we've been able to push a number of options through to completion that had seemed reckless.

The benefits and accomplishments were recognized. Today there's no smug euphoria, but there is a conscious enthusiasm. It's less exuberant, but it's our best source of support and allows us to make further decisions. One example: when you invite all the country's functionaries to take up sports and you say that this will be taken into account for promotions, you have to have the courage of your convictions. It's all well and good to be convinced of the beneficial effects of physical exercise but it's not easy to accept. Yet people did it.

Rapp: Everyone?

Sankara: No. Here and there people refused or said that we shouldn't have done it. It was above all a handful of petty bourgeois who dreaded having to make the effort. But overall it is accepted. People don't make it a fighting question. They believe we know where we're going. Today, popular sport has become a real, integral part of our way of life.

Rapp: Some people talk about a drop in the level of enthusiasm and mobilization.

Sankara: The seductive side, the fascination of such a new phenomenon has worn off. People are already familiar with our general orientation — some can even guess in advance more or less what will be said and done. People continue to like the revolution, though the proselytizing ended some time ago.

Unfortunately, badly informed observers have claimed that this reflects a drop in enthusiasm, a demobilization, etc., but this is not so.

Rapp: Does Thomas Sankara still know what is happening in the country — the attitude of certain functionaries who abuse their power, or the actions of this or that CDR that is terrorizing the neighborhood?

Sankara: It is now 10:00 p.m. Once we are done here, around midnight, I'll be leaving for a small village, where I'll stay until 5:00 a.m. You have to take the time to listen to people and make a real effort to enter into every milieu, including the less commendable. You have to maintain relations of all kinds — with the elderly, the young, the athletes, the workers, the great intellectuals, and the illiterate. In this way, you can gather a mountain of information and ideas.

When a leader addresses the public, I think he should do it in a way that makes every single person feel included. When congratulations are in order, everyone should have the feeling that he, personally, is being congratulated.

When it's a question of criticism, everyone must recognize his own action in the criticism — everyone must know that he has done such a thing himself, have the feeling of standing naked, of being ashamed, and determined to not make the same mistakes again in the future. In this way, we can become collectively aware of our errors and retrace our steps together. I must take steps to inform myself, and I must break with protocol and everything that boxes us in. At times, too, I must say what I have discovered and denounce specific situations. This shakes people up. Of course, I'm not informed about

everything, especially since there are those who are hesitant to speak to me, who believe I'm not accessible. Efforts must be constantly made to bring us closer together. Every week I answer, at the very least, fifty or so private letters that ask me the most unimaginable and unanswerable questions. But ties are being forged. I am extremely pleased when people present their proposals to me in response to the problems I've laid out, even if we don't always accept their particular solution.

Rapp: How do you foresee a more systematic way of handling this? It's hard to believe that you're not completely snowed under.

Sankara: The National Council of the Revolution will soon be setting up a mechanism to deal with it. But the important thing is to convince everyone that he has the right to make complaints, and that maybe his complaint will be resolved, and in any case it will be studied with the same consideration and importance no matter what powers have been conferred on the person who has been upsetting him. We have to set the example ourselves, even when our own family is concerned.

Rapp: With the course you have taken, do you foresee the creation of a single party and when?

Sankara: The future is leading us toward an organization much more developed than the current mass mobilization, which is of necessity much less selective. So a party could come into existence in the future, but we don't intend to focus our thought and concerns on the notion of a party. That could be dangerous. We would be creating a party in order to conform to revolutionary dictums. "A revolution without a party has no future." Or to belong to an International for which this would be the precondition for membership.

You cannot create a party with the will of leaders alone. This opens the door to all kinds of opportunism. A party has to have structures, leaderships, and representatives. Who would do this other than those who are there already and who are not necessarily the most combative? All kinds of people would swear by this party in order to be sure of a post, a little bit the way the carving up of government ministries is viewed. Certain people would suggest we divide it this way so that they, too, can have a post. We must at all costs avoid the opportunist temptation to create a made-to-measure party. The creation of a party after the seizure of power is a truly tricky undertaking.

There's also a disadvantage to parties. They become too restrictive, overly selective in relation to the masses who are mobilized.

From the moment you begin to base yourself on a mere minority, the masses become disconnected from the struggle you are waging.

The party is therefore required to play the role of leader, guide, and vanguard capable of leading the whole revolution, to be a completely integral part of the masses and, for that, those who are members must be the most serious ones who are moving forward and who are succeeding in firmly convincing others by their own concrete example. But first the masses must be allowed to struggle without a party and fashion their weapons without a party. Otherwise you fall into using a *nomenklatura*.²

Rapp: We are fifteen years away from the year 2000. In your opinion, are we going to see a rebirth of continental united fronts? Or are we going into the same situation as existed in Havana in 1966 when each revolutionary nationalist entity acted on its own, with no cohesion and no unity beyond national borders?

Sankara: This is a difficult question and my answer is really speculation. But I think we are going toward greater cohesion. We must be optimistic even though it's natural and human, at a time when sovereign states are mushrooming, that each one should be more preoccupied with its new powers than with understanding the evolution of the world. There are as many shades of opinion as there are books. But this will change.

Of course, those who came before us were more or less obliged to act the way they did in order to show the way forward, even if sometimes they fell into acting like messiahs. But more and more, we are talking about universal civilization as well as a universal revolution. Imperialism has been organizing an International of domination and exploitation on a world scale for a long time, yet we have no International of the revolution, of resistance to oppression. Of course there have been some attempts — the three Internationals — and I've even heard talk of a fourth.

Step by step leaders as such will be superseded by the organized masses, especially thanks to the means of communication that break through all barriers and reduce distances. And thanks, too, to the leveling out of different cultures, so that we can feel things in more or less the same way. So the current leaders will be superseded.

Rapp: How will you solve the problem of illiteracy?

Sankara: With regard to our education we intend to attack both the container and its content. When the colonial masters opened schools, they had no benevolent or humanitarian intentions in mind.

Their concern was to produce clerks capable of holding down posts useful to their system of exploitation. Our task today is to inject new values into our schools, so that they can produce a new human being capable of understanding ideas and functioning harmoniously and completely as an integral part of the movement and dynamic of our people.

Rapp: But isn't your main concern to democratize education in Burkina?

Sankara: Precisely. Until now only the privileged have had access to schools in Burkina. Democratizing education means building classrooms everywhere. Today, people are mobilized to that end — and with such enthusiasm, in fact, that they have outstripped the government's capacity to back them up technically. They're going a little too fast for us, but we're certainly not going to stop something that's going so well.

Rapp: In 1984, 1,500 teachers who were members of the National Union of African Teachers of Upper Volta were fired. Can you really afford the luxury of such a decision when over 90 percent of your population is illiterate?

Sankara: They were fired for waging a strike that was, in reality, a subversive movement against our country. At the time we told them very clearly, "Do not go ahead with this strike because it is part of a destabilization plan aimed against both us and Ghana." The date for the action had been established jointly. There was supposed to be a coup attempt in Ghana, our neighbor, and simultaneously a series of strikes in Burkina. We had been informed of this and took the necessary measures.

You know that in our country strikes have always been used to make and break regimes. We publicly provided a certain amount of proof in this instance, but not all of it for fear of exposing certain sources of information. We invited the organizers of the action to stop the movement. On the same day, Friday, March 23, a French television network broadcast a program devoted entirely to a Burkinabè dissident. The maneuver was transparent. They were aiming to build this man up, to give him a certain credibility. It was a double maneuver aimed at both putting this kind of individual back in the saddle and destabilizing the situation inside the country.

We arrested the main leaders, who had received a sum of \$250,000 to hand out in order to buy support for the action. As part of the same operation, security agents also arrested a unionist who,

according to our information, was not involved in the plan. We released him for the simple reason that he was protesting legitimately as a unionist and had no hand in the plot.

Rapp: But why take it out on the teachers?

Sankara: We weren't against the teachers but against the plot that was using the teachers. [The Voltaic Progressive Front,] the party that instigated the plot, is made up predominantly of primary, secondary, and even university teachers. It launched its shock troops against our regime — a regime that it has condemned ever since August 4, 1983, since the day it was born. We acted on our threat because it seemed extremely serious to us that these teachers, who have enormous responsibilities and yet cannot make decisions for themselves, would allow themselves to be led off like Panurge's lambs.

Rapp: Given Burkina's urgent educational needs, people find it hard to understand why you don't modify your position now.

Sankara: We are taking the time to examine one by one the cases of those who have written to us in repentance. In general, there is no question of entrusting the education of Burkinabè children to people who are irresponsible. The door is not closed, however. We are rehiring little by little, depending on our appreciation of the individual's concrete conduct, whether or not he shows a sincere capacity to change his character and become more responsible. Many are in the process of being rehired or are well on the way.

Rapp: In the meantime, with whom have they been replaced?

Sankara: With others of the same level — people we called on and to whom we've given a minimum of training, especially ideological training. We simply cannot submit to the wholesale blackmailing of our people. The education of Burkinabè children was taken hostage to try to force us to resign.

Rapp: But when only 16 percent of the budget goes to education, and only 20 percent of your children finish their education, what measures can you take to get better results?

Sankara: Even 100 percent of our budget wouldn't be enough to educate all of our children. So we have to call on other forms of education that have nothing in common with the classical teaching models. We'll be launching a campaign soon in which everyone who knows how to read will have the duty of teaching others. Those who don't participate will lose the possibility of continuing themselves.

Rapp: But how will you do this? Through a kind of public service?

Sankara: We will launch a vast national campaign that will take us everywhere. What's more, I'm convinced that all problems between men are problems of communication. When you speak and people don't quite understand what you are trying to say, misunderstandings are always possible. We need a good dose of nonconformity. You'll see.

Rapp: Does this mean that you are thinking more generally about setting up a public service?

Sankara: We do want to completely reorganize our military service. Right now military service is obligatory and lasts eighteen months. But with the means at our disposal we are reaching only 2 percent of those eligible.

In Burkina the army serves as an opportunity, a stable job. The stampede in the recruitment offices is the complete opposite of the situation in Europe. I remember when I was in training with French officers we were given courses to equip us to convince young people to agree to a military life. In Burkina we learn how to turn away the greatest number.

Rapp: What will you change, and with what goal?

Sankara: Military service will be lengthened from eighteen months to two years. During this period people will obviously learn how to use weapons. But three-quarters of their time will be spent on production. This is because we believe the defense of a people is the task of the people themselves. They must be able to mobilize and have access to the necessary weapons, for we have many enemies. We think, too, that it is out of the question to entrust the defense of a country to a minority, no matter how specialized it may be. The people must defend themselves. They must decide to make peace when they cannot or do not wish to pursue a war. They must decide, too, what the army should be.

Rapp: What does this mean concretely?

Sankara: We don't want a caste sitting on top of others. We want to break with this kind of reasoning and make a number of changes. Our stripes, for example. We want to change these so that the army fuses with the people.

Rapp: What do you mean by "spent on production"?

Sankara: Some of those doing their national service will work in agriculture. Others will teach or be health-care workers. We're not talking about them becoming medical doctors, but gaining a certain knowledge of hygiene and first aid so that they can teach others lifesaving techniques. That's all. It will be much more valuable than multiplying the number of doctors by ten. We're not thinking of any innovations on that score. We are considering a system that would mobilize people from different social layers and different ages, somewhat similar to the Swiss system.

Rapp: But what qualifications will these people have?

Sankara: They will be quite heterogeneous. Medical doctors, before entering into public service, should take it upon themselves to practice in the armed forces. In this way they could discover or rediscover the Burkinabè people. We would call up both high-ranking academics and simple peasants alike. For a small number it would even be possible to do an apprenticeship, or at least to learn the rudiments of a trade: agriculture, livestock breeding, construction, etc.

Rapp: And what about those who are currently enlisted?

Sankara: Similarly, we believe the army to be an arm of the people and that it cannot live in tranquility and opulence that clashes with the chronic misery of the masses. Our soldiers must constantly feel what the masses are feeling. It's not right that military men should be paid regularly whereas the civilian population as a whole does not have the same possibilities. So to bring military personnel into contact with reality we put them in touch with the needs of the day. We've decided that in addition to their professional military activities, they should participate in the economic life of the country. We've instructed them to build chicken coops and proceed with rearing livestock.

Rapp: What was the slogan?

Sankara: One quarter of a chicken per soldier per week. This way, not only will the quality of food improve, but, in addition, this particular layer of people with regular salaries will not be buying chickens and this will necessarily lower the price for the civilian population. With this kind of training, the soldier who is ordered to do this or who takes the initiative himself will acquire the habit of this sort of conduct and continue it when he goes home. So the movement will be generalized. Some say we have already gone over our

goal. This is all we ask, because the revolution is a means to a better life, but above all a better life and greater happiness for all.

Rapp: You are not immune to imminent physical elimination. What image would you like to leave of yourself and your role if this happens?

Sankara: I would simply hope that my contribution had served to convince the most disbelieving that there exists a force, called the people, and that we must fight for and with these people. I would like to leave behind me the conviction that if we maintain a certain amount of caution and organization, we deserve victory — a sure and durable victory. I would like this same conviction to take hold of all others so that what seems to them today to be a sacrifice will seem tomorrow to be normal and simple gestures.

Maybe in our lifetime we'll seem like we are tilting at windmills. But perhaps we are blazing the trail along which, tomorrow, others will surge blithely forward, without even thinking — as we do when we walk. We place one foot in front of the other without ever questioning, though all our movements are subject to a complex set of laws having to do with the balance of our bodies, pace, and rhythm. It will be a real consolation to myself and my comrades if we have been able to be useful, if we have been able to be pioneers. Provided, of course, we're able to get that consolation where we're going.

Rapp: If someone does not share your views, are you prepared to use violence and constraint and, in doing so, go against the convictions you hold?

Sankara: Given a choice between two solutions, I am not prepared to say I would choose violence, but I do know that the logic of some situations sometimes leaves you no choice. This is a decision that you must make alone. It is distressing, painful. It causes great anguish. The following day you come face to face with those against whom you have had to order violent measures, and all the time, until the very last minute, you were hoping there would be some other way to avoid resorting to violence, a way to save men. And sometimes you don't find a solution.

Rapp: Against what kind of people have you had to use violence?

Sankara: There are those who naively think that they can get away with anything. This is not a serious problem. We don't have to use maximum force against these people.

Then there are those who for their own ends devise elaborate, cyn-

ical, and Machiavellian means to provoke us to outbreaks of violence. They send people to plot against us. If you show weakness toward them and they succeed, everything you have accomplished, all your commitment to the service of the masses, will be reduced to nothing. These people are totally cynical. They care nothing for the lives of those they enlist for their plots. We can catch ten, twenty, thirty. They won't shed a single tear. They'll simply go out and find others to send against us.

And should you fight back against these actions with violence, they resort to powerful, even terrifying means to try to give you a bad conscience. "There's a man with blood on his hands," they say. But the point is, should you sacrifice the majority in order to preserve a minority — which sometimes amounts to no more than one man? Somebody must decide these questions, alone.

Rapp: A difficult task that could lead to arbitrary decisions?

Sankara: It's extremely difficult for the individual with regard to his own conscience. Outwardly, one can refuse to listen to or understand what is being said. There are those in other places who have bathed in blood without feeling the slightest remorse. But inwardly, if one has a minimum of conviction and faith in humankind, it is profoundly upsetting. I am a military man. I can be summoned to the battlefield at any moment. On the battlefield, I hope to be able to help my enemy and spare him senseless suffering, even though the logic of the battlefield demands that I use my weapon against him and kill him as quickly as possible in order not to be killed myself.

Rapp: But how far are you willing to allow your enemies to go before resorting to violence?

Sankara: I hope to be able to give my enemy the opportunity to comprehend me, because from that moment on he will understand one fundamental thing: we can disagree on a certain number of questions without my necessarily being against him. The goals I am striving for are noble. But he thinks my means are bad, inadequate? If that's what he thinks, we should discuss it.

Rapp: But what if his position is more radical?

Sankara: We have set a number of prisoners free, including the one who betrayed me and had me imprisoned. I am still alive not because he took pity on me nor because he didn't try to kill me. I was fired at. I am not dead. I was lucky.

We set him free. Some people say we acted out of weakness, for

sentimental reasons. But my concern is that this man understand he is at our mercy, that he always has been, and that even today we could still condemn him to death by firing squad, but that something higher than revenge prevents us from harming him.

Rapp: Why didn't you have him executed?

Sankara: We weren't after his life. It's true we could have had him executed the day we took power.

Rapp: Your attitude was maybe simply a good political move?

Sankara: Today he probably thinks that I declared him a free man to give myself a good image. He is probably thinking, "We are definitely enemies, but since he is the stronger at this moment I'll play dead and take my revenge as soon as the opportunity arises." I don't know, but it would sadden me to think that he sees anything in this act other than a profound conviction that we must reach the point where all men can listen to each other and work together. This is a very long and painstaking task.

Rapp: Executions have, however, been ordered.³ Were these souls that could not be saved?

Sankara: Any soul can be saved. I believe that a man's better side is always ahead of him. But we were in a particular situation that did not allow me to respond favorably to requests to pardon those condemned. Justice had to take its course.

Rapp: Aren't you afraid that tomorrow it could all be over?

Sankara: No. That kind of fear I do not have. I have told myself, either I'll finish up an old man somewhere in a library reading books, or I'll meet with a violent end, since we have so many enemies. Once you've accepted that reality, it's just a question of time. It will happen today or tomorrow.

Rapp: Do you know other kinds of fear?

Sankara: Yes, the fear of failure, the fear of not having done enough. You can fail because of a disagreement, but not because of laziness, because you should have, you had the means to, and you didn't do it. I do fear that, and I'm prepared to fight all the way against such a thing. Imagine what it would be like if tomorrow someone said you'd stolen money and it were true; or if you let people die of hunger because you didn't have the courage to punish the person responsible for bringing them food but had failed to do so;

that you knew this man and you knew that he was guilty as accused. I should have, and I didn't. If this were true and because of this I were to be executed, fine. But if I weren't to be executed, that would be a cross I would have to bear for the rest of my days — the cross of my own incapacity, of shirking my responsibilities. Every day of my life, having to explain myself to everyone — that would really drive you out of your mind. Imagine you're out there in the street, on the sidewalk, a man talking to himself, trying to tell everyone: "I am innocent, believe me, save me." No. This would be impossible.

Rapp: But doesn't a kind of Sankara madness already exist in a certain way?

Sankara: Yes. You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. Besides, it took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen.

Rapp: To invent the future?

Sankara: Yes. We must dare to invent the future. In the speech I gave launching the five-year plan, I said, "All that comes from man's imagination is realizable for man." I am convinced of that.

Notes

1. Cartierism was the idea, promoted in the early 1960s by French journalist Raymond Cartier, that foreign aid to the newly independent countries in Africa should be drastically cut, ostensibly because of corruption among the leaders of the former French colonies.

2. The list used to make appointments to high government and administrative posts by the top echelons of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.

3. On June 11, 1984, seven people, arrested May 26 and 27, were executed for plotting a coup. They included several former military officers, the head of security at Ouagadougou airport, and a former mayor of Ouagadougou.

We Are in Solidarity with Our Neighbors

September 11, 1985

In this speech, given to a mass rally on September 11, 1985, in Ouagadougou, Sankara reported on a special meeting of the Entente Council he attended the day before in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. The speech is translated from Sidwaya, September 13, 1985.

Comrades, we were called upon today to respond to international imperialism and its local lackeys who, from the very moment we stood up, began to tremble. [Applause] We have no speeches for them, except to recall that as we meet here, imperialist radios everywhere are tuned into Ouagadougou. [Applause] We know that in the imperialist dens they will try to scrutinize what we say here. Above all, they will try to discern how far the Burkinabè people are willing to go to repel the enemy. I say to you that we will push him back until we have drowned him in the ocean! [Applause]

We are aware that right now they are attempting to cook up plots against our people. In particular, they are trying to make the noise of marching boots resound at our borders. They are trying to create, to unleash, an unjust war on many fronts against the Burkinabè people — to push us into conflict with other peoples. They are attempting to manipulate those who are susceptible to manipulation. But we maintain the serenity, calm, and tranquility of a people that has confidence in its strength and knows that the limits of its struggle will be determined not by the enemy, but by the people itself.

I say that once the Burkinabè people have decided to go forward, only Burkina Faso, only the Burkinabè people themselves, will decide how far we will go. [Applause] On behalf of all of you, I issue a very firm warning to those who confuse Burkina Faso with Upper Volta. [Applause] I issue a firm warning to all those who would dare disturb the tranquility of any Burkinabè, here or abroad. [Applause]

We have no need for foreign troops or advisers. A short while ago,

the comrade commander in chief brought you some very clear, fighting words. He explained that you are the shock troops that will seize the citadels from which the thieves are now conspiring against us. I will complete his message by saying that though we possess no arms, providing we are great in numbers, we will — and I promise you this — go and take our arms from the enemy. [*Applause*] So all the equipment, the arsenal of war and death, that the enemy is assembling at this very moment will be ours! [*Applause*]

Comrades, it is obvious that a demonstration of this kind is not to everyone's liking. But I want to insist above all on the friendship and internationalist duty that must be with us at all times. The struggle waged by the Burkinabè people is not at all a chauvinist struggle. Our struggle will in no way be a limited struggle characterized by narrow nationalism. Our struggle is that of all peoples aspiring to peace and freedom. This is why we must never lose sight of the qualities and the just aspiration toward peace — a just peace, dignity, and genuine independence — of the peoples that surround us.

Of course, they must carry out their historic duty. They must rid themselves of all the serpents that infest their territory, of all the monsters who rob them of their happiness. We have shouldered our responsibilities. Other peoples must do the same — their youth, their patriotic and democratic forces, their civilian and military personnel, their men and women alike.

We want to build an Entente Council, a revolutionary Entente Council, and we will exhaust all of our energy to ensure that our just perspective triumphs. In this, we can count on the peoples of Benin, Niger, Togo, and the Ivory Coast because we know that these peoples are in need of freedom, dignity, peace, and security; and because we know that these peoples have understood that only revolution can enable them to rid themselves of all those inside and outside their countries who stand in the way of achieving this noble goal.

This is why we say that today it is the Entente Council; tomorrow, thanks to the peoples of Togo, Benin, Niger, the Ivory Coast, together with the Burkinabè people — independently of the desire of others — it will be the revolution. [*Applause*] The revolution is already under way.

We are well-informed of their plots, their attempts to divide and create opposition as well as their assassination attempts. But we also know that these out-and-out reactionaries do not understand, and confuse, the forward march of the people with the evolution of individuals.

This is why, as I have said before, attacking this or that leader will

never suffice to put an end to the revolution. It is why we say, too, that their plots will never be able to stop the revolution. It is well under way and will triumph. It will liberate all the peoples.

Since we spoke of security measures at Yamoussoukro it is natural that we seek the ways and the means to concretely insure that security. But it will never happen — we will never obtain this security as long as the revolution has not liberated the peoples. Our struggle is not limited to the concept of alliances. Other peoples on our borders also need revolution. Of course, I am not talking here about Ghana. But I am talking about Mali. [*Applause, cheers*] Our sister republic of Mali can and must understand that its happiness is our happiness; its misfortune is our misfortune; the worries of the people of Mali are also those of the Burkinabè people; its preoccupations are our preoccupations; and the Burkinabè people's revolution is at the disposal of the people of Mali, who need it. [*Applause*] Because only revolution will allow them to fight against hunger, thirst, disease, ignorance, and above all, against the neocolonial, imperialist forces that dominate them. Only revolution can free them.

Given that revolution cannot be the monopoly of one people, we have the duty to recognize that all peoples aspire to revolution and they are on the move. Therefore, the revolution is advancing. We thus salute the just struggles these peoples are waging every day and we will not fail to be present at our rendezvous with them to celebrate the joyful day when they will have destroyed all their enemies, within and without. [*Applause*]

Of course, this must be repeated and stressed, they must assume the historic responsibility for their own liberation. There is absolutely no question of waiting for the saving grace of any other people or messiah. This would be an error, a monumental, gross, and counterrevolutionary error.

Whether the revolutionary Entente Council comes into being or not [*Shouts of "It will, it will!"*], the security of our people depends on each combatant, inside and outside the country. We must call on those combatants outside the country to redouble their vigilance and fervor in unmasking the plots that are being fomented so that they can uncover the vermin's tracks and so that with our invincible flame-throwers, we can pour fire on our enemies, burn them to a cinder, and reduce them permanently to dust. [*Applause*]

This evening we were simply called upon to reaffirm something we have become permanently convinced of: we needed to reaffirm the mobilization and determination of the Burkinabè people; we needed to state and stress with force that we are in solidarity with our

neighbors. This very evening I will send a message in your name to Félix Houphouët-Boigny [*Applause*], a message to Eyadéma, to Seyni Kountché, one to Moussa Traoré, one to Mathieu Kerekou, and one to Rawlings¹ [*Applause*] to tell them that we reaffirm our solidarity with their peoples, and that all of the just struggles of their peoples will be our struggles. [*Applause*] I hope these messages will be read in their capitals.

Whatever the case, we will send our message because it is one of friendship, a friendship that has no need whatsoever of legal agreement. [*Applause*] We will tell them, too, that we think that the Entente Council already provides the basis, a juridical and moral framework, for permanently defending our different interests. We do not think other documents and legal provisions should be added.

What have we been doing since 1958 — in fact since the Entente Council was created — if it has taken until 1985 to formulate agreements? This is disturbing.

Comrades, thank you for coming out in such great numbers and for having shown that our mobilization and enthusiasm are permanent, and that our struggle will be victorious.

Long live the people of Ghana!

Long live the people of Benin!

Long live the people of the Ivory Coast!

Long live the people of Niger!

Long live the people of Togo!

Long live the people of Mali!

Revolution for all!

Revolution for all!

Revolution for all the peoples!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you.

Notes

1. Félix Houphouët-Boigny has been the president of Ivory Coast since independence from France in 1960. Gnassingbe Eyadéma is the president of Togo. Seyni Kountché was president of Niger from 1974 until his death in November 1987. Moussa Traoré is the president of Mali. Mathieu Kerekou is president of Benin (formerly Dahomey). Jerry Rawlings is Ghana's head of state and government.

We Fought to Repel the Enemy

January 3, 1986

In December 1985, Malian troops, backed by tanks, armored cars, and jet fighters, invaded Burkina, starting a war that lasted five days. The government of Mali, which was receiving arms from France, used a border dispute as the pretext for the war. The following is excerpted from Sankara's January 3, 1986, speech to a Burkina-Mali solidarity rally in Ouagadougou, after the signing of a cease-fire. The speech originally appeared in French in Sidwaya on January 6, 1986.

Comrades of the democratic and popular revolution:

As the year was drawing to a close, on December 25, 1985, our population was bombarded by planes and wounded and killed by tanks and military personnel from the other side. We fought back. We confronted the enemy's material superiority and abundant supplies with collective political and revolutionary determination. We unleashed our creative genius, and our strategists have written heroic deeds into the pages of African military history. This is how we protected our people. We protected them because they were under attack, and we owe them liberty and tranquility day and night. We defended them, thus fulfilling a revolutionary duty.

War is nothing other than an extension of politics. The enemy's politics were extended and became war. Our politics were extended and became a generalized popular defense. Two political lines confronted each other, and one triumphed.

Dear comrades, on this January 3, 1986, I would like us to think about all those from both Burkina and Mali who fell on the field of honor and to think about all those who were injured, all the tearful families, our two peoples and other African peoples touched by this painful confrontation. I would like each of us to make an effort to surmount all feelings of hate, rejection, and hostility toward the Malian people. I would like each of us to win the ultimate victory by

killing all seeds of hostility and enmity within us toward anyone. This is an important victory to win. We must plant the seeds of genuine friendship in our hearts — a friendship capable of withstanding the murderous assault of cannons, planes, and tanks. This kind of friendship can only be built on the revolutionary bedrock of sincere love for other peoples.

I know that you are capable of this kind of love for the Malian people — capable of demonstrating it to them. We will demonstrate it to them. Our brothers from Mali have said in their speech that they are for dialogue. First, we answer yes. But then we must put these words into practice. It is for this reason, comrades, that as far as we are concerned, there has never been anything but friendship and love between the peoples of Mali and Burkina. Comrades, are you or are you not for friendship between our two peoples? [*Shouts of "Yes!"*] There. The people — the guardians of power in Burkina — have spoken. On their behalf, I inform the entire world that there are no longer any political prisoners from Mali in Burkina. The Malian military personnel remaining in Burkina are no longer prisoners. They are our brothers. They can return to Bamako when and as they wish, in total freedom.

We did not fight in order to take prisoners. We fought to repel the enemy. The enemy has been repelled and every Malian in Burkina Faso is our brother. Starting today, arrangements will be made for them to live in freedom, for them to taste joy and liberty in Burkina, especially in Ouagadougou. Their families in Mali should know that they can come and fetch them or wait for them at Bamako airport as they wish.

Comrades, let us avoid being diverted and dragged into fights that are not the peoples' fights. Let us avoid being involved in concerns that are not concerns of the people in this mad race toward conflict and excessive armament. We know that there is strong pressure on us to keep pace step by step with the military arsenals of others, giving them a justification for their bellicose actions and sometimes even an easy and convenient pretext for holding the masses for ransom. This will not be the case with Burkina.

The Western media, the imperialist press, has often said of Burkina that it is over-armed. You have always read in the papers that our country has received tons and tons of military equipment. Fortunately, this same media has passed sentence on itself by reversing its opinion on this and recognizing that Burkina is militarily under-equipped. We are not the ones who said this. They wrote it. Burkina is indeed underequipped. Everything they wrote about us before was

a slander, and today they are face to face with their own slander and lies. It is quite clear now which countries are overarmed and which have military hardware at their disposal. It is also clear which countries impose sacrifices for the social, political, and economic development of their people rather than for excessive militarization.

These five days of events allowed Burkina to wash away the shame and reestablish the truth. They allowed the entire world to see us as we really are, so that only those who detest revolution — and there are many — will continue their maneuvers to spread confusion. Future battles await us, and we must win them.

I would like to wish all of you happiness for the year 1986, which is beginning — a happiness in keeping with our goals and with the kind of efforts we are ready to make. In wishing you all a good and happy year I would also like to ask all of you to brace yourselves and look on the experience we have just been through as an episode, an unfortunate episode, but nevertheless one rich in lessons.

I would like us all to analyze the experience, because as revolutionaries we know that every day is a day of confrontation. We know that since that day, March 26, 1983 — when we proclaimed on this very spot, “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles” — we know that ever since that day we have been standing face to face with imperialism and its local lackeys.

Save Our Trees, Our Environment, Our Lives

February 5, 1986

Sankara spoke in Paris at the First International Tree and Forest Conference on February 5, 1986. This speech is translated from the version that appeared in Carrefour africain, February 14, 1986.

My country, Burkina Faso, is without question one of the rare countries on this planet justified in calling and viewing itself as a microcosm of all the natural evils from which mankind still suffers at the end of this twentieth century.

Eight million Burkinabè have internalized this reality during twenty-three painful years. They have watched their mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters die, decimated by hunger, famine, disease, and ignorance. With tears in their eyes, they have watched their ponds and rivers dry up. Since 1973 they have seen their environment deteriorate, their trees die, and the desert invade the land with giant steps. It is estimated that the desert in the Sahel advances at the rate of seven kilometers per year.

Only by looking at this reality can one understand and accept the birth of the legitimate revolt that matured over a long period of time and finally erupted in an organized form in Burkina Faso the night of August 4, 1983, in the form of a democratic and popular revolution.

At this conference I am merely a humble spokesperson who refuses to watch himself die for having passively watched his natural environment die. Since August 4, 1983, water, trees, and life — if not survival itself — have been fundamental and sacred in all actions taken by the National Council of the Revolution, which is leading Burkina Faso.

In this regard, I must thank the French people, its government, and in particular its president, François Mitterrand, for this initiative, which reflects the political genius and clarity of a people always open to the world and sensitive to its misery. Burkina Faso, which is

situated in the heart of the Sahel, will always show the appropriate appreciation for such initiatives, which are in total harmony with the Burkinabè people's most vital concerns. We will find a way to be present every time it is necessary — as we do not do for futile projects.

For nearly thirty years now, the Burkinabè people have been fighting a battle against the encroachment of the desert. It was thus obligatory for us to be here at this conference in order to talk about our experience and benefit from that of other peoples from around the world. For nearly three years, every happy event in Burkina Faso, such as marriages, christening services, the presentation of awards, and visits by well-known individuals and others, is celebrated with a tree-planting ceremony.

For the new year 1986, the schoolchildren of our capital, Ouagadougou, constructed more than 3,500 improved stoves with their own hands for their mothers. This is in addition to the 80,000 made by the women themselves in the last two years. This was their contribution to a national effort to reduce the consumption of firewood and protect the trees and life.

The ability to buy or simply rent one of the hundreds of the public dwellings built since August 4, 1983, is strictly conditional on the tenant or owner planting and nurturing a minimum number of trees as the apple of their eye. There have already been evictions of those who do not respect their commitment, thanks to the vigilance of our Committees for the Defense of the Revolution — those very CDRs that poisonous tongues like systematically and unequivocally to decry.

In a few weeks, we successfully vaccinated 2.5 million children between the ages of nine months and fifteen years, throughout Burkina and in neighboring countries, against measles, meningitis, and yellow fever; we have sunk more than 150 wells, guaranteeing drinking water for the twenty or so sectors of our capital that until now lacked this necessity; and we have raised the rate of school attendance in Burkina from 12 percent to 22 percent.

The Burkinabè people are now conducting a successful struggle for a green Burkina. Ten million trees have been planted under the auspices of a People's Development Program lasting fifteen months — a first venture while the five-year plan was being prepared. In the villages in the developed river valleys, families must each plant one hundred trees per year. The cutting and selling of firewood has been completely reorganized and is now strictly regulated. To carry out this work you must now hold a wood merchant's card, respect the

zones designated for cutting, as well as pledge to reforest the cleared areas. We have resurrected an ancestral tradition so that every town and village in Burkina today has a wood grove.

Thanks to our efforts to make the people aware of their responsibilities, we have freed our urban centers from the plague of roaming livestock. In the countryside, we are focusing on the fight against the primitive nomadic approach to rearing livestock by working to settle the livestock in one place as a means of promoting intensive stockbreeding.

All criminal acts of pyromania that result in forest fires are judged and sentenced by the village Popular Conciliation Courts. The planting of a certain obligatory number of trees is one of the forms of punishment meted out by these courts.

From this coming February 10 to March 20, 35,000 peasants who are leaders of village groups and cooperatives will take intensive courses in reading, economic management, and environmental organization and maintenance.

Since last January 15 a vast operation called the People's Harvest of Forest Nurseries has been under way in Burkina with a view to supplying the 7,000 village nurseries. We sum up all of these activities under the banner of the "three battles."

Ladies and gentlemen:

I say all this not to shower unrestrained and unending praise on the modest, revolutionary experience of my people with regard to the defense of the forest and the trees, but rather to speak as explicitly as possible about the profound changes occurring in relations between man and tree in Burkina Faso. I would like to depict for you as accurately as possible the deep and sincere love that has been born and is developing between the Burkinabè man and the trees in my country.

In doing this, we believe we are applying our theoretical conceptions concretely to the specific ways and means of the Sahel reality, in the search for solutions to present and future dangers attacking trees the world over. Our efforts and those of all who are gathered here, the experience accumulated by yourselves and by us, will surely guarantee us victory after victory in the struggle to save our trees, our environment, in short, our lives.

Excellencies;

Ladies and gentlemen:

I come to you in the hope that you are taking up a battle from which we cannot be absent, since we are under daily attack and believe that the miracle of greenery can rise up out of the courage to say what must be said. I have come to join with you in deploring the

harshness of nature. But I have also come to denounce the one whose selfishness is the source of his neighbor's misfortune. Colonialism has pillaged our forests without the least thought of replenishing them for our tomorrows.

The unpunished destruction of the biosphere by savage and murderous forays on the land and in the air continues. Words will never adequately describe to what extent all these fume-belching vehicles spread death. Those who have the technological means to find the culprits have no interest in doing so, and those who have an interest in doing so lack the necessary technological means. They have only their intuition and their firm conviction.

We are not against progress, but we want progress that is not carried out anarchically and with criminal neglect for other people's rights. We therefore wish to affirm that the battle against the encroachment of the desert is a battle to establish a balance between man, nature, and society. As such, it is a battle that is above all political, one whose outcome is not determined by fate.

The establishment in Burkina of a Ministry of Water, in conjunction with our Ministry of the Environment and Tourism, demonstrates our desire to place our problems clearly on the table so that we can find a way to resolve them. We have to fight to find the financial means to exploit our existing water resources — that is to finance drilling operations, reservoirs, and dams. This is the place to denounce the one-sided contracts and draconian conditions imposed by banks and other financial institutions that preclude our projects in this area. These prohibitive conditions bring on traumatizing indebtedness robbing us of all meaningful freedom of action.

Neither fallacious Malthusian arguments — and I assert that Africa remains an underpopulated continent — nor those vacation resorts pompously and demagogically called “reforestation operations” provide a solution. We are backed up against the wall in our destitution like bald and mangy dogs whose lamentations and cries disturb the quiet peace of the manufacturers and merchants of misery.

This is why Burkina has proposed and continues to propose that at least 1 percent of the colossal sums of money sacrificed to the search for cohabitation with other planets be used by way of compensation to finance the fight to save our trees and life. While we have not abandoned hope that a dialogue with the Martians could result in the reconquest of Eden, we believe that in the meantime, as earthlings, we also have the right to reject an alternative limited to a simple choice between hell or purgatory.

Explained in this way, our struggle to defend the trees and the

forest is first and foremost a democratic struggle that must be waged by the people. The sterile and expensive excitement of a handful of engineers and forestry experts will accomplish nothing! Nor can the tender consciences of a multitude of forums and institutions — sincere and praiseworthy though they may be — make the Sahel green again, when we lack the funds to drill wells for drinking water just a hundred meters deep, and money abounds to drill oil wells three thousand meters deep!

As Karl Marx said, those who live in a palace do not think about the same things, nor in the same way, as those who live in a hut. This struggle to defend the trees and the forest is above all a struggle against imperialism. Imperialism is the pyromaniac setting fire to our forests and savannah.

Presidents;

Prime ministers;

Ladies and gentlemen:

We adopted these revolutionary principles of struggle so that the green of abundance, joy, and happiness could come into its own. We believe in the power of the revolution to stop the death of our patrimony and open up a bright new future for it.

Yes, the problem posed by the forest and the trees is exclusively the problem of harmony between the individual, society, and nature. It is a fight that can be waged. We do not retreat in face of the immensity of the task. We do not turn away from the suffering of others, for the desert today knows no limits.

We can win this struggle if we choose to be architects and not simply bees. This would signify the victory of consciousness over instinct. We should say yes to the bee and the architect! If the author of these lines [President Mitterrand] will allow me, I will extend this twofold analogy to a threefold one — that is, we should say yes to the bee, the architect, and the revolutionary architect!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you.

On Books and Reading

February 1986

This interview with Sankara by Elisabeth Nicolini is translated from the version that appeared in the March 12, 1986, issue of the Paris magazine Jeune afrique. It is copyright 1986 and reprinted by permission.

Elisabeth Nicolini: You came to France recently to participate in the Tree and Forest Conference, where the problem of the advancing desert was raised — a problem of great concern to your country. Have you read many books on this topic?

Thomas Sankara: [Smiling] No, they're too dry.

Nicolini: What was the last book you read?

Sankara: *La gauche la plus bête du monde* (The most stupid left in the world) by Jean Dutard. There are some amusing things in it. It's relaxing.

Nicolini: This is a book on the upcoming legislative elections in France, written by a right-wing journalist. Does the election campaign in France interest you that much?

Sankara: No. I find it amusing.

Nicolini: But you read political books?

Sankara: Of course. Without giving myself away, I can admit to being familiar with the classics of Marxism-Leninism.

Nicolini: You've surely read *Capital* by Karl Marx.

Sankara: No, not all of it. But I have devoured all of Lenin.

Nicolini: Would you take these works with you if you were stuck on a desert island?

Sankara: I would certainly take [Lenin's] *State and Revolution*.

This is a book I take refuge in, that I reread often. Depending on whether I'm in a good or a bad mood, I give the words and sentences different interpretations. But on a desert island, I would also take the Bible and the Koran.

Nicolini: You find that Lenin, Jesus, and Muhammad go well together?

Sankara: Yes. There are many references to the Bible and the Koran in my speeches. I think that these three works form the three most powerful currents of thought in our world, except perhaps for Asia. *State and Revolution* provides an answer to problems that require a revolutionary solution. Then the Bible and the Koran allow us to synthesize peoples' past and current thought in space and time.

Nicolini: Which is the most revolutionary of the three in your opinion?

Sankara: That depends on the epoch. In modern times, Lenin is unquestionably the most revolutionary. But it's also undeniable that Muhammad was a revolutionary who provoked much social upheaval. Jesus too, but his revolution was never completed. Jesus ends up being more abstract, while Muhammad was able to be more concrete. We took Christ's word as a message capable of saving us from the real misery we live in, as a philosophy to qualitatively transform the world. But we were disappointed by how it was utilized. When we had to look for an alternative, we found the class struggle.

Nicolini: Are there any political writers whose writings you appreciate more than others?

Sankara: In general, I find them all interesting — military books, books on tactics, or how to organize work. De Gaulle, for example — I've read most of his books, Mitterrand's too, such as *L'Abeille et l'architecte* (The bee and the architect). Mitterrand writes well but not just for the pleasure of writing. You can see through his writings that he wanted to become president, and he succeeded.

Nicolini: I suppose you have a library?

Sankara: No, absolutely not. My books are all in footlockers. A library is dangerous. It's too revealing. I don't like to tell people what I read, either. I never make notes in a book or underline passages. That's where you reveal the most about yourself, it can turn into a real personal diary.

Nicolini: Apart from official speeches, do you write?

Sankara: Yes, I have for a long time — since 1966 when I was still in high school. Every night in fact. There was a short interruption starting in 1982, but I've picked up the thread again since then. I write down my thoughts.

Nicolini: Do you intend to publish them?

Sankara: No, I don't think so.

Nicolini: What book would you like to have written?

Sankara: A book on how to organize and build happiness for the peoples of the world.

Nicolini: Don't you like literature for relaxation?

Sankara: No, I don't read to pass the time or to discover well-constructed narrative.

Nicolini: How do you choose your books?

Sankara: Well, first I should say that I buy them — it's the title more than the author that attracts me. I don't read to discover the literary itinerary of a writer. I like to keep on top of new men and new situations.

Nicolini: Let's talk for a moment about African literature, Burkinabè writers. Who has made an impression on you?

Sankara: I don't like African novels any more than I like African films. Those I've read have really disappointed me. It's always the same story: young man from Africa leaves for Paris, suffers, and returns home at odds with tradition.

Nicolini: You're referring to *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane!

Sankara: Yes. I don't like this way of depicting people. It's not really blacks who are speaking in African literature. You get the impression that you're dealing with blacks who want to speak French at any price. That annoys me. The authors should write as we speak today.

Nicolini: You'd rather they use broken African French?

Sankara: To a certain extent, I'd prefer that. Anyhow, the African writers I like best are those who deal with concrete problems, even if I don't agree with their positions. I don't like writers who write for literary effect.

Nicolini: In your office in Ouagadougou you have the complete works of Lenin, a really fine collection.

Sankara: Yes, but I've read Lenin in a much more practical collection, the same kind as the paperback series I used to see when I went to buy my supply of books in Paris at 1 Paul-Painlevé Place, at the Herbes-Sauvages Bookstore.

Nicolini: Are you familiar with Arabic literature?

Sankara: Yes, I've read several Algerian and Tunisian books — a book about Oum Kalsoum, the Egyptian singer. Who was its author? I never remember names. I've also read a book called *L'Autogestion en Algérie* (Self-management in Algeria) written by a member of the National Liberation Front.

Nicolini: So you don't read novels?

Sankara: No, almost never. I did read one recently by accident called *L'Amour en vogue* (Love in fashion). It was a rather candid story. It was on sale — I went into a bookstore and bought it.

Nicolini: You don't read detective stories either? Not even a book like *SAS*, by Gerard de Villiers, that took place in Ouagadougou?

Sankara: No, I'm not interested in them — they're in the same category. It seems that Gerard de Villiers came to Ouaga before writing his book *SAS*. He never asked to see me.

Nicolini: Would you have met with him?

Sankara: Why not? In terms of spy books, I'm reading a book at the moment called *The Devil's Alternative* by Frederick Forsyth. It sheds a lot of light on the duplicity of the big powers.

Nicolini: There's a Burkinabè author called [Joseph] Ki-Zerbo whom you evidently know well and who lives in exile. Have you read his books?

Sankara: Yes, his studies are very interesting. But he's still an African with a complex. He came to France to learn, then returned home to write so that his African brothers could recognize and see in him what people in France had been unable to see or recognize. Nothing is more frustrating for an African than to arrive at his peak without having been recognized in France. At home, at least, he says to himself, his greatness will be recognized.

Nicolini: What has become of him?

Sankara: When the revolution called him, he fled. I've asked him to come back twice, but he wants to hide his continual failures. He was never able to succeed in Burkina, neither by the electoral nor the putschist route. This is why he has left the country. I met with him twice before he left. We were happy to see him leave because we sensed that he was really very scared. We didn't want him to die — to croak in our arms — because this would have provoked some awful accusations. Once out of the country he went over to active opposition. But he can come back any time. The door is always open.

Abuse of Power Must Be Foreign to the CDRs

April 4, 1986

Sankara gave the closing speech to the First National Conference of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which took place in Ouagadougou from March 31 to April 4, 1986. The conference was attended by over 1,300 delegates. This speech is translated from a pamphlet published by the CDR National General Secretariat.

After what we have just seen and heard my task has been greatly facilitated and I will have only a few things to say to you.

Our arduous task is drawing to a close. We are nearing the end of a particular kind of test, the first of its kind, in the course of which the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) have voluntarily and consciously agreed to take a critical look at themselves. They have been in session nonstop, day and night, in the spirit of criticism and self-criticism, with the goal of examining the work of the CDRs over the past two and a half years of revolution in Burkina. This principle itself is a victory in the sense that only revolutions are willing to subject themselves and their struggle to criticism. Revolutions are the opposite of reaction, which sings its own praises only to fail totally in the end. [Applause]

Comrades, I want first to ask all the foreign delegations who weren't able to be represented here to understand and excuse the procedure we followed. We judged that this first conference of the CDRs should be conducted virtually behind closed doors, that is, among Burkinabè only. This in no way means, however, that we are ignoring the internationalism that binds us to other struggles, and I'm sure they will grant us their indulgence and understanding. In fact messages and delegations were prepared to be sent here from around the world. We ask all those fraternal countries and sister revolutions who understandingly withheld their delegations to communicate to

their people the internationalist greetings of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution of Burkina Faso. [*Applause*]

I would like to thank the Pioneers who were present here and who played a leading role in this first national conference from beginning to end. For us, the Pioneers are our hope, our hope of tomorrow. They are today a symbol of and a model for the future. But at the same time they show each of us the daily task we must accomplish. How well and how consciously we live up to our responsibilities toward these young revolutionaries will determine in good part what becomes of them and their revolution. As revolutionaries we have no right to think that these Pioneers should be marginal to our revolutionary activity, that they should become part of our activity only once they reach the age of eighteen. Wherever revolutionaries are concerned with the lives of these Pioneers, they should assume their responsibilities by supporting, educating, and raising the consciousness of these young children so that they grow up, live, and die as revolutionaries. [*Applause*]

How could we fail to congratulate and admire these young children — the Voice of the Pioneers, the orchestra from Bobo Dioulasso, the Little Singers with the Raised Fists from Ouagadougou, the Little Dancers from CDR District Twenty-seven in Ouagadougou and CDR District Six from Banfora who performed a short while ago. How can we fail to be heartened! We know the minute we see them perform and express themselves that our culture is in good hands. If only each one of us had been able to learn music and master our culture at this age, Mozart would be a very mediocre celebrity today compared with us. Alas! We grew up with deficiencies. [*Applause*]

I would also like to thank the National Union of Elders of Burkina (UNAB) for its participation in this First National CDR Conference of Burkina Faso. [*Applause*] UNAB makes an important contribution. It is very important, in fact, because we know that, on a tactical level, if we do not mobilize the elders our enemies will mobilize them against us. [*Applause*] Reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries everywhere encourage us to ignore the elders so that they can be mobilized against us. [*Sustained applause*] Well, comrades, let's not play the game of reaction and counterrevolution. Let's not play the game of populism. Instead, let's state that there must not be a single human being in Burkina Faso, regardless of age, who has not been mobilized. We need everyone.

And nevertheless I must say to our dear comrade elders that, just as it's true that snow on the roof doesn't mean it's not warm inside,

we must understand that it's equally true that among the elders there are tortoises with double shells. [Applause] There are also predatory owls that strike in the darkness, [Applause] and a certain number of fence-sitting chameleons who think that the revolution just gave them a dangerous opening, like in a game of checkers, to position themselves for their favorite sport — intrigue, plots, settling of accounts, defamation, scheming, and heaven knows what else! The elders themselves have primary responsibility for unmasking and combating these unscrupulous elders. [Applause] If after crossing swords with these bad elders — and they are generally tenacious because they have tough hides [Laughter] — the good elders haven't managed to succeed, they should call on the CDRs and give us permission to act. We will know what to do, won't we comrades? [Shouts of "Yes!" and applause] So let's be vigilant.

We would like to thank the Women's Union of Burkina (UFB) [Applause] whose silence at the beginning of the conference was particularly "deafening" and noted. [Applause] This mass organization, a latecomer compared with other organizations, is nevertheless far from marginal to our victorious march forward. We have confidence in the UFB that all women — all our women and all the women of the entire world — will be mobilized. So the task is great.

I congratulate the CDR National General Secretariat for the important organizing work that has been carried out. [Applause] I congratulate it all the more since it was not certain that we could organize an important meeting like this with such meticulous care in the short amount of time at our disposal.

Our daily paper, *Sidwaya*, in a fit of impertinence dared to speak ill of our National General Secretariat, which will reply to this meddling by *Sidwaya* at the appropriate moment. [Applause]

Good! Congratulations to all of the organizers and all those who came from other provinces for this impressive event, for we have yet another victory to our credit.

Do you remember on August 4, 1984, after the celebration of the first anniversary of the democratic and popular revolution, the reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries claimed in unison that we had squandered billions and billions for the celebration, so big and wonderful was the event? It drove them wild. It was beyond the imagination of these gentlemen that revolutionary capacity could compensate for and even surmount our lack of resources! Since then, they no longer talk about the billions spent. To the contrary, when they hear that we are organizing a celebration they go into a state of panic and



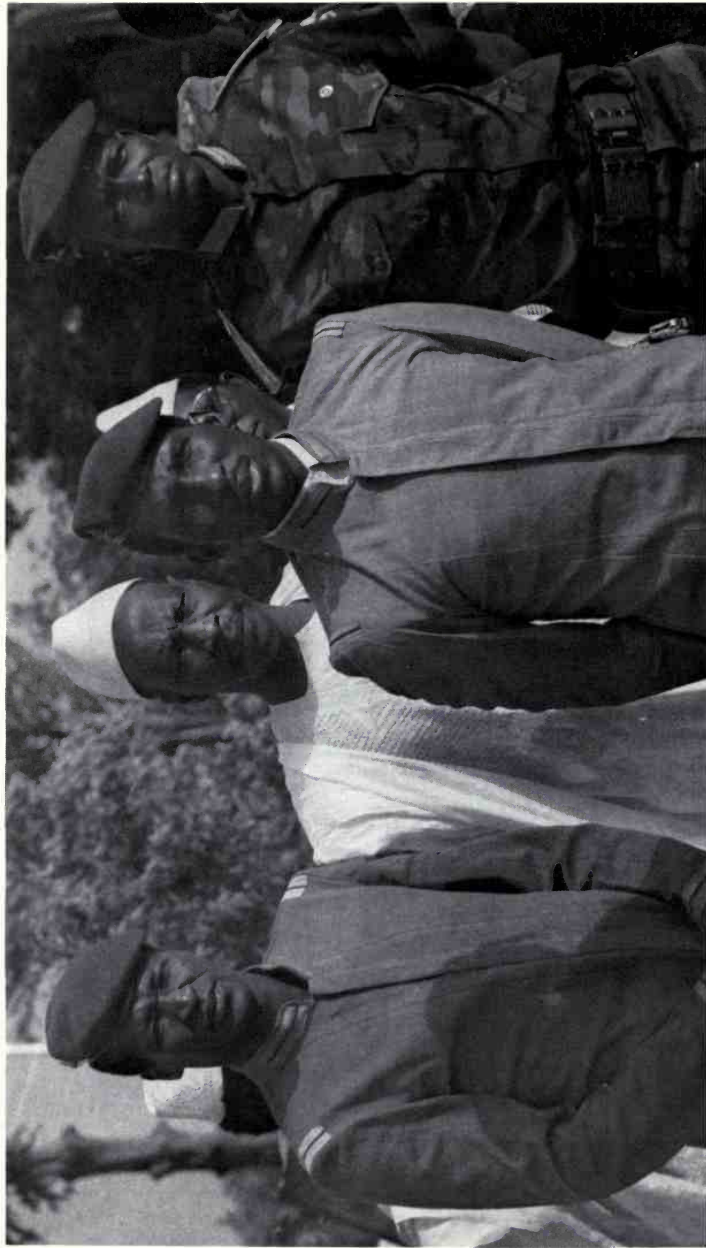
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Women in Kaona, Burkina Faso, terrace soil to control erosion, April 1986.

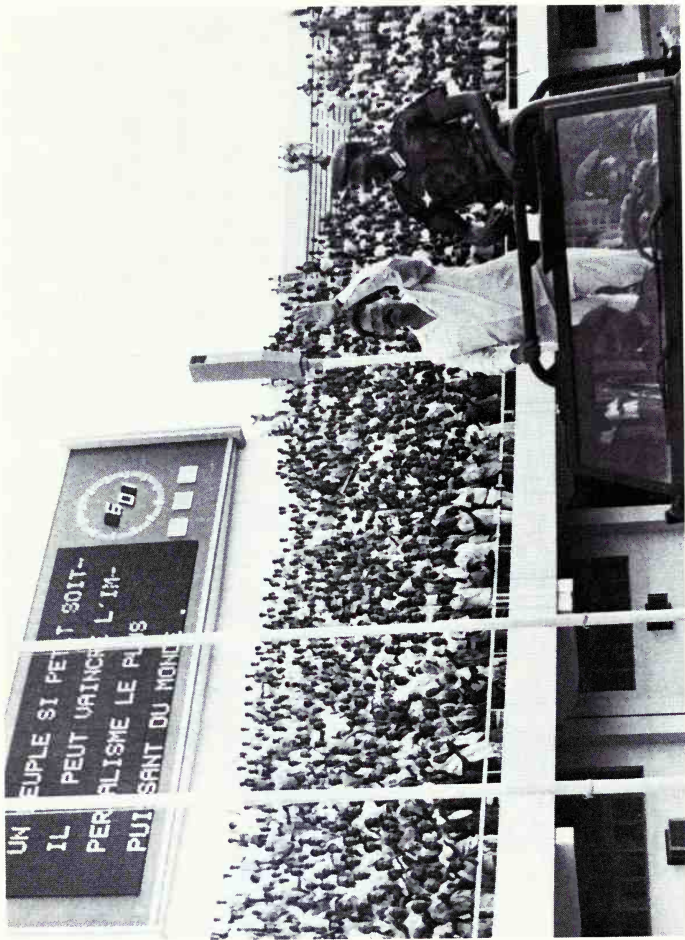


UN photo

Agricultural cooperative near Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso, April 1986.

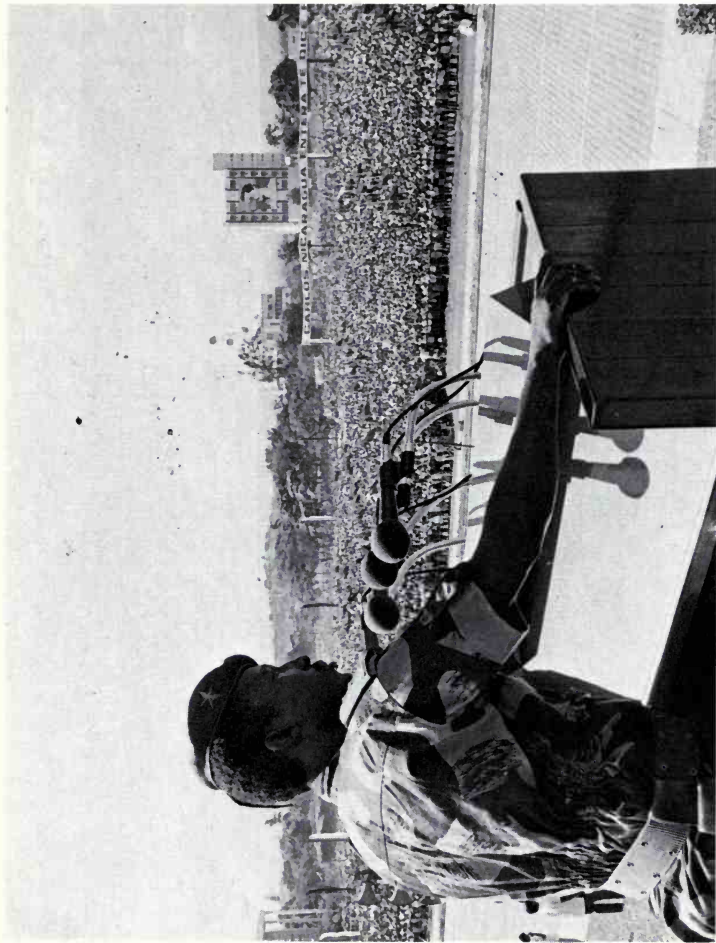


Sankara with Blaise Compaoré at far left and Etienne Zongo at far right.



Barricada

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega with Sankara, Ouagadougou, August 1986. Scoreboard: "A people, however small, can conquer the most powerful imperialism in the world."



Barricada

Sankara speaks in Managua, Nicaragua, November 8, 1986.



Barricada

From left: Nicaraguan Minister of Transportation William Ramírez, Sankara, and Ortega, Managua, November 8, 1986.



Managua, November 8, 1986.

Barricada



Margaret A. Novicki/Africa Report

Tomato harvest, Sourou Valley irrigation project.



Ernest Harsch/Militant
New construction, Cité An III housing complex on General Sandino Street,
Ouagadougou, 1987.

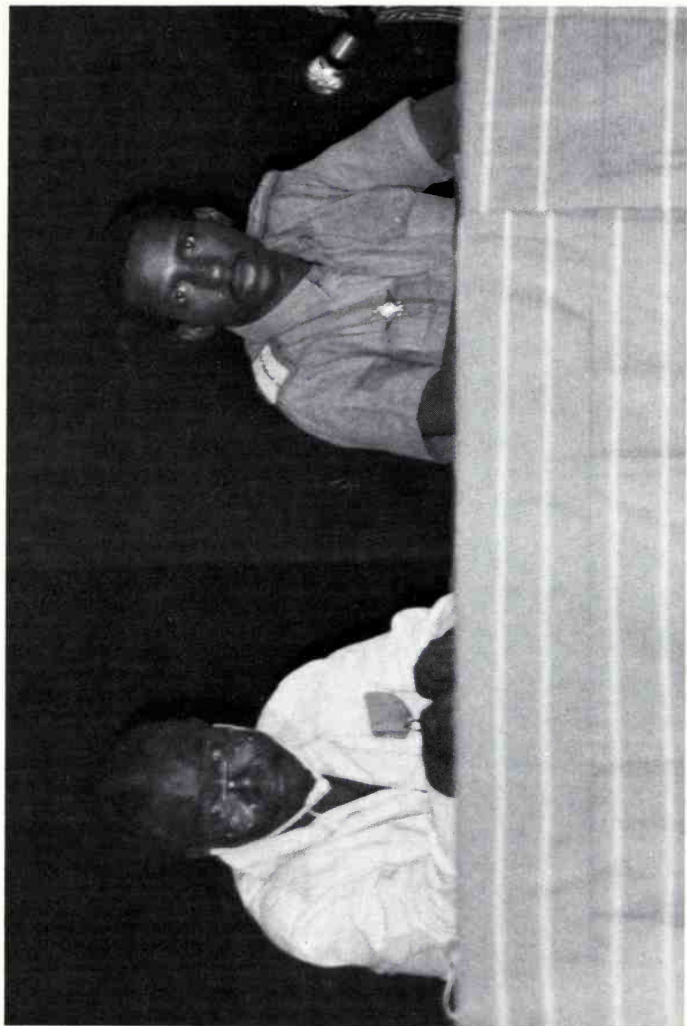
Ernest Harsch/Militant





Ernest Harsch/Militant

Sankara speaks, International Women's Day, March 8, 1987.

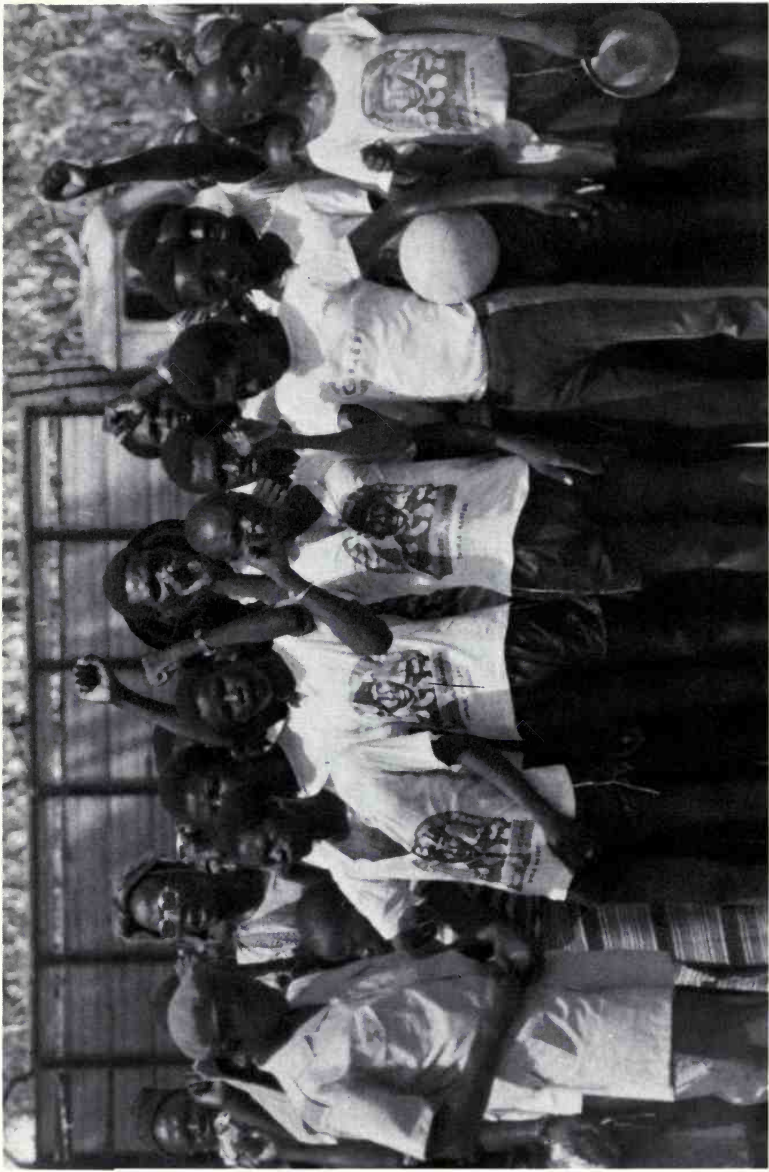


Ernest Harsch
ANC leader Mark Shope, at left, with Sankara, at Bambata Pan-African Anti-Apartheid Conference, Ouagadougou, October 11, 1987.



Ernest Harsch

Peasants' rally, Pibaoré, Burkina Faso, October 1987. Banner: "Farmers of Burkina Faso: hoes yesterday, hoes today, machinery tomorrow."



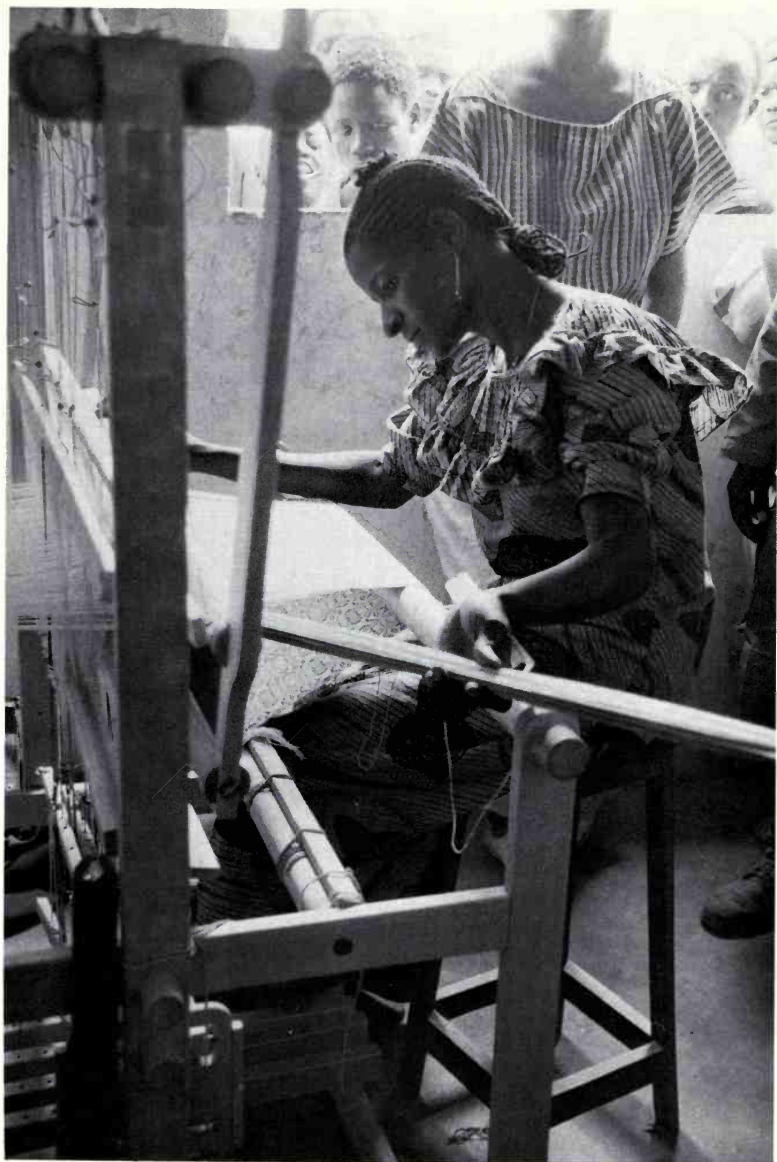
Peasant youth at rally, October 1987.

Ernest Harsch



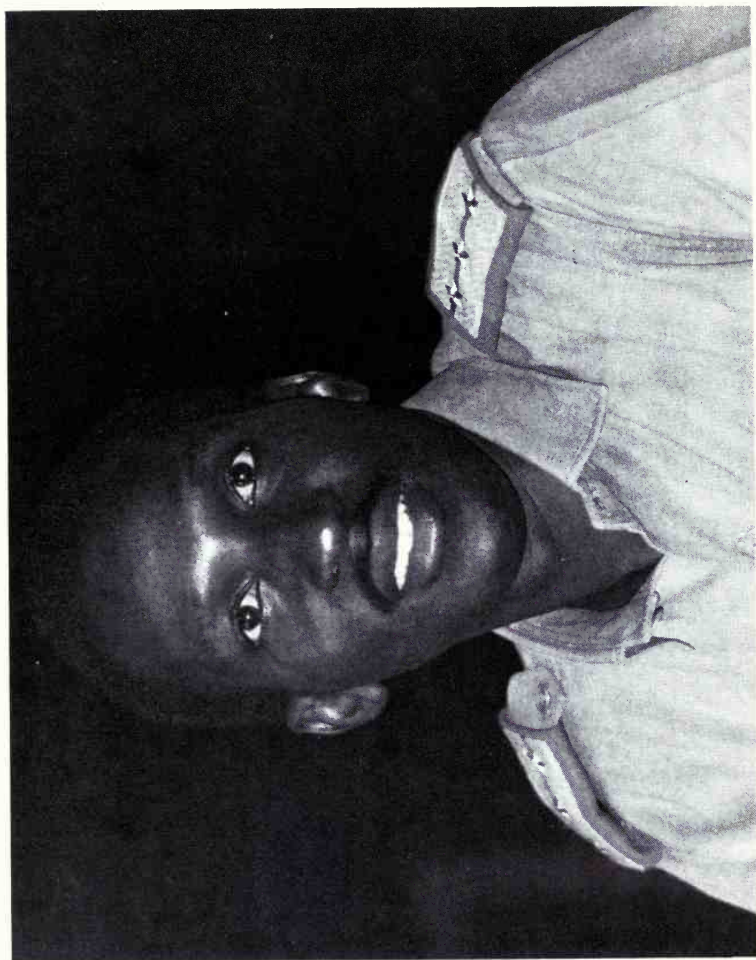
Ernest Harsch

Tree-planting ceremony at peasants' rally, Pibaoré, Burkina Faso, October 1987.



Margaret A. Novicki/Africa Report

Weaver in Bombore, Burkina Faso.



Ernest Harsch

try as best they can to sabotage it.

The last Summit Conference of the Heads of State of the West African Economic Community (CEAO) was a resounding success for the democratic and popular revolution. [*Sustained applause*] It was a success not because it brought us great resources, but because revolutionaries outdo themselves when they are attacked — and we were attacked, as you well know! [*Applause*] We even commanded the respect of those who didn't want to come. They came despite themselves, right here to Ouagadougou. [*Applause*]

The most recently held session of the People's Revolutionary Courts, the fifteenth of its kind, was likewise the international reflection of this revolutionary authority. [*Applause*] We tried and passed sentence on international crooks!¹ [*Applause*] We dared to do what many dared not do. In the process, we proudly established the people's court as a form of legal power essential to the peoples of the world.

We are pleased to note that here and there our example has given rise to attempts at imitation. [*Applause*] Elsewhere, too, people want to try and pass sentence, and we know that this can be done anywhere in the world. But the difference is between daring to tell the truth, the whole truth, or being obliged to tell half-truths because maybe you are involved yourself, or perhaps because you head a reactionary and corrupt regime. [*Applause*] Have you ever seen a cat ask for a certificate of good behavior for its son? [*Laughter, applause*] He is a thief himself. But we know that even cats can put on the air of a serious person.

We warn those who imitate us: They can follow our lead, they can imitate us, but there is a secret, one secret, that they do not have. This secret, while it allows us to overcome great obstacles, will lead to their downfall. [*Applause*]

Comrades, there was a lot of talk when we called this national CDR conference. It was said here and elsewhere that the conference would be an opportunity to tell all, and by "tell all" certain people understood that it would be the place to settle certain accounts with certain individuals. Others said that this conference would be a mere masquerade with the appearance of letting the people speak but in reality a block to the truth being told. At the very moment I am speaking, there are those who think this because they didn't have speaking rights.

There were more than 1,310 delegates at the conference. Allowing only ten minutes for each delegate — the mathematicians among us can figure it out — it would have amounted to ten days in a row of

just listening to contributions. This would obviously have been impossible! So, we had to proceed through composite resolutions. I must admit that the synthesis of certain theses occasionally distorted ideas to the point that some proposals and points of view were not adequately or entirely expressed in the final analysis and review. This is unfortunately the product of normal rules that govern a project aimed at the participation of the greatest number of people, not simply a minority.

That is also why, from now on, I urge the CDR National General Secretariat to take all necessary steps to be able to periodically, every trimester, say, organize meetings between itself and the main representatives of the CDRs across the country. This would enable it to hear more of the thinking of each one so that when it comes to synthesizing their ideas we won't unintentionally distort them. *[Applause]*

There were those who believed that this First National Conference had been called to definitively lay the CDRs to rest. Some people really did come here to present their condolences to the National Secretariat — hypocrites in many cases, since they really came to celebrate the disappearance of these famous CDRs.

Why the CDRs?

You know that, historically, nothing could be more wrong than the idea that the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were created the day after August 4, 1983, etc. The CDRs were born with the first bullets that were fired here. The CDRs were created precisely on August 4. *[Applause]* The CDRs were born dialectically along with the revolution in Burkina Faso *[Applause]* because the very moment we pronounced the word “revolution” in this country, we felt the need to defend it — and he who speaks of revolution without taking the necessary measures to protect it makes a serious error and misunderstands the capacity for fighting and destruction of the forces of reaction. As for us, we called on the masses everywhere during the night of August 4 to organize themselves into CDRs because we had no illusions; the revolution would come under attack.

The revolution was attacked. It is still under attack today and will be in the future. Thus, the CDRs were also attacked. They are still under attack today and will be in the future. *[Applause]* Not one of the positive accomplishments of the revolution could have been carried out without the CDRs. However, we in the CDRs know that we are not perfect. We know this, but we continue to look for examples of perfection in this world of ours.

We in the CDRs have had to exercise popular power. As such we

are directly involved in every aspect of national life on the political, economic, and military level — on every level, in fact, of the lives of Burkinabè. So it is important to understand that the correct functioning of the CDRs has beneficial and favorable consequences for each one of us. To turn your back on the CDRs is to do harm to yourself, unless you are in a position to leave Burkina. We need the CDRs and we will always need the CDRs, whatever form they might take in the future.

But we notice that certain people from abroad, on arrival in Burkina Faso, think that the country is divided into two parts: there is the normal Burkina Faso with a flag, an anthem, offices, an administration, functional structures; in other words, the Burkina Faso that knows the right rules, that wears white gloves, handsome ties, and heaven knows what else! And then there's the Burkina Faso of the CDRs. Oh, those CDRs! [Applause] And they tell us what a magnificent country we have! And what colossal work has been accomplished! But unfortunately, there's the problem of your CDRs. [Applause] But what should we do with the CDRs? Put them in bottles? There are so many of them that if we were to put them in bottles, they'd be in all the bars! [Applause]

Even Burkinabè say to us, "Ah! Comrade President, believe us, we are quite satisfied. What has been accomplished is magnificent, but couldn't you see what you can do about the CDRs [Laughter] because these children. . . ." I listen to their proposals and advice with great interest and with all due respect for the white beard that speaks in this way before asking them what, in reality, is the difference in age between those in the CDRs and myself? [Applause]

No! We could never agree to put aside the CDRs. There are not two Burkina Fasos. There is one single Burkina Faso — the Burkina Faso of the CDRs. Our country begins and ends with the CDRs. [Applause] This is why CDRs must rapidly be formed wherever they do not yet exist. Wherever there are Burkinabè, their first reflex must be to form a Committee for the Defense of the Revolution because they exist thanks to the revolution. If they do not do this, they are going against the revolution and there is no reason for them to benefit from the revolution's blessings.

I must tell you that in this respect we have encountered some problems with different international organizations that, claiming that they are not political, oppose the formation of CDRs in their ranks. Well, we say that all Burkinabè who work in international organizations must remain connected to the revolution through the CDRs. [Applause] So there must be CDRs everywhere. [Applause] In short,

I'll not name any of these international organizations, they know who they are.

When we tried the thieves from the West African Economic Community, those bankers, crooks, and opportunists, if there had been a single Burkinabè from the CEAO involved, do you think the CDRs would have drawn up a motion of congratulations for that thief? So you see, the CDR — the inspiration behind the people's court — is a guarantee for the CEAO against thieves! It is because the CDRs exist that we dared to go after the unscrupulous thieves. They've been making billions for a long time. [*Applause*]

So we say once and for all that all international organizations that accept our presence must likewise accept the presence of the CDRs. Of course, we will respect the rules and statutes of these international organizations. We organize within them to the extent possible. We're not talking about asking the Secretary General of the United Nations for permission to hold a general assembly of the CDRs in that glass house in New York, even though that wouldn't be so much to ask!

This First National Conference of the CDRs must produce greater cohesion and organic unity and broader internal agreement. This is very important. As a founding CDR member, I cannot avoid the responsibility of criticizing the CDRs profoundly and totally; but at the same time, I do not hesitate to give them all the support and reinforcement they require to continue to advance. [*Sustained applause*]

We must have the courage to take a frank look at ourselves. There are unscrupulous CDR members in our ranks! We must not shy away from this fact. As you well know, very few people wanted to join the CDRs at the beginning of the revolution. But when it became clear that the CDRs were a tool to resolve a certain number of problems, the old maneuverers took up their old tricks again and got themselves elected within the CDRs. [*Applause*] You can see them driving around in their cars while we're out waging the Battle for the Railroad.² Their first question is, "Will the television be coming?" [*Laughter, applause*] As soon as they are sure that the television will be there, they put the ice chest into the car, cold beer and all, and off they go to wait, driving around and around in their cars in front of the cameraman, who doesn't seem to understand. [*Laughter*] Finally they call over the cameraman and tell the crew, "Ah, you guys, we're working hard here, we've been here for hours! Oh, yes!"

Journalists being journalists, the inevitable question is asked: "What are your impressions?" This is the moment they've been waiting for. [*Applause*] One of them will promptly answer, "Yes! Yes!

My impressions are very impressed, my impressions are very favorable. One thing's for sure, we're standing together as one!" These old refrains, you know them well! We sang the same one in Revolution Square, the old January 3 Square. "We're standing together as one," we sang, while some were going off to the left and others to the right. [Applause] Ah, yes! These opportunists have understood which way the wind is blowing, this wind of power, and there they are in the CDRs doing everything they can to get elected and become officials.

I'm going to say something now that may well cut both ways, but I'll say it anyhow because it is true. We often see the following kind of thing with regard to our Revolutionary Solidarity Fund: "Contribution from such and such a comrade of one-tenth of his salary per month — who requests to remain anonymous." Well! Do you know what form this anonymity takes? The good comrade, this great and valiant activist, first goes to see his supervisory minister and tells him, "Comrade minister, I've donated a part of my salary but I've asked to remain anonymous because I am a man who likes to be discreet." [Applause] He then goes to the National Secretariat of the CDRs and repeats the same thing. "I'm contributing, but I want to remain anonymous. I want to be discreet." He goes to his local CDR and says the same thing.

He writes a long letter to the comrade president, explaining how, since the historic night of August 4, [Laughter] his checkbook quivers just for the revolution, but he requests to remain anonymous. He signs the letter, prints his name, his first name, his CDR district number, his date of birth, the names of his wife and children. [Laughter] He writes to the comrade who is minister of family development and requests anonymity. And then he waits.

A ministerial council announces that the comrade has given up one-tenth of his salary for three months, asking to remain anonymous. Meanwhile, the entire town — especially his constituents — knows who this generous, anonymous person is. All this is nothing but a ploy to get elected.

Of course, let no one say because of this that it's not worth sending a contribution to the solidarity fund. We must continue to build it, along with all the other funds that need a lot of money to help those who criticize our funds, but who nevertheless take advantage of them. [Applause]

This is how political power is used for opportunist ends. There are unscrupulous elements in our midst. We must remove them. These neofeudal elements are present in our ranks. They must be rooted

out, combated, and defeated. They set themselves up as veritable despots in our local districts, villages, and provinces. They are every bit as dangerous as despots. Their method of functioning is anarchist. They reign and hold sway like warlords. In fact they're fascists. When all is said and done, they're anarcho-fascists, a new race we have to deal with. [*Sustained and loud applause*]

It is in this regard that the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, particularly those in the service sector,³ sometimes become real instruments of terror against directors. Right now, there are directors of services who can no longer even sign a dispatch note, they are so afraid of their CDR. [*Applause*] There are some directors of services who can't decide what color paint to use for their cars without calling a general assembly, they have been so terrorized. They have been literally brutalized — threatened with suspension, firing, and dismissal. We must admit that there has been some settling of accounts, which needs to be redressed today. [*Applause*]

Or there are cases, too, of directors who have obtained their posts through maneuvering — going door-to-door every night — in order to be named director. They are then at the mercy of those who nominated them. We have seen political cowardice on the part of some CDRs, which don't have the courage to assume their responsibilities. I'll use the example of a suspension. A comrade is suspended for a wrongdoing — something serious. The comrade is out there on the street complaining vociferously and issuing threats and those same people who had proposed his suspension come and say, "Well, you know, we weren't aware ourselves." [*Applause*] This kind of cowardice must be combated.

When the CDRs come under fire, they run to the National Secretariat and say, "We're under attack by a group of fascists, populists, counterrevolutionaries, and reactionaries." No! They must face their enemies where they are. [*Applause*] Let's pursue this! Are we here in Ouagadougou supposed to resolve the problem of counterrevolutionaries confronting our CDRs thousands of kilometers away? This is a poor understanding of the role of the CDR National Secretariat. Some people have no hesitations at all in crossing the Mediterranean or Caspian Sea in order to come to Ouagadougou, to the Sahara, and explain the problem. No! It's over there in Trocadero, in the Nineteenth Arrondissement [of Paris] that you have to fight back and triumph, not here! Comrades who happen to be in Leningrad or Bouaké [Ivory Coast] are not the ones who will wage the battle for CDR District Twenty-six.

On the military level, the CDRs have often been crammed with in-

competents. Competency is not reducible to being able to handle a weapon. If it were merely a question of this kind of dexterity, we could simply go down to Ouagadougou's prison. There are many very adroit people to be found there. If it were just a question of know-how and intelligence, we could simply ask Moussa Ngom. He, as you know, is very skilled. His boss, [Mohamed] Diawara, could be national general secretary of the CDRs. [Moussa] Diakité could take care of social matters. [*Lively applause*]

Well, we have had a lot of accidents. These have not been the result of inadequate training. I insist on pointing this out right away. There has not been a higher rate of accidents with our weapons in the CDRs than among regular troops, either here in Burkina or abroad. There are accidents every year in every army in the world; they are just not talked about. People die in these accidents, parachutists, pilots, etc. When the French plane came down in Bangui, how many people died? Quite a few, anyway, and this was no CDR. You see, there are accidents everywhere. When the *Challenger* exploded, people died! It was an accident. Accidents happen, even at NASA! They happen everywhere.

What must be condemned is not this, but rather the presence of unscrupulous elements in our ranks. This is what we must combat. In order to show off, these elements sport a whole arsenal of weapons, as if they needed — as if they were Himmler's assistants. No! These elements must be pushed aside. They are very often the cause of accidents. "If you do that, I'll blast you." This is the kind of thing we must condemn. This is the kind of person you must work to punish severely from now on. This is the way it should be. The person who is not sure of himself should put down his weapons.

On the military level, we know, too, that during patrols, some CDRs have committed unspeakable atrocities. But since unspeakable is not a revolutionary concept, we must speak of everything. CDRs actually took advantage of their patrols to engage in looting. Well, we will pursue them from now on as we would thieves and we'll shoot them down. It's as simple as that. Let this be clear! We have arms to defend the people. All those who steal from and pillage the people will be shot down.

There have even been cases, we should speak about this too, where another kind of settling of accounts has occurred during periods of curfew. This, too, must be condemned. Certain comrades — because they are CDR members responsible for security and armed with a big gun that they are not even sure will fire — have given themselves all kinds of liberties. During the period when the

curfew began at 7 p.m., they would show up at a female comrade's house at 6:50 p.m. and start saying to their rivals, to other suitors, "It's almost time! Everyone out! Everyone out! If you don't leave, you'll be locked up." This is what they did! Some even asked that the curfew be maintained permanently so that they could continue to reign supreme. Well! We lifted the curfew so that we could all be on an equal footing in this regard, and so that those who deserve to lose because of their incompetence would lose.

On the military level again, we've seen CDR members scruffily dressed. Of course, the problem of uniforms is a real one. It is true that there are not enough. But the little you have, you must take care of. They are dressed in a scruffy, negligent, slovenly fashion. No! From now on, no CDR leader should have the slightest hesitation in reprimanding forthwith members who show up badly dressed. This is merely an outward sign of an incapacity to organize oneself.

We have seen CDRs arrest someone and lock them up just like that. "It's the rules, justice, we will deal with you," they say! No! Every Burkinabè has the right to the protection of the CDRs. The CDR headquarters must not be a torture center but a place where leaders can be found who lead, organize, mobilize, educate, and struggle as revolutionaries. You can educate with firmness, but you must be clear in your firmness. Abuse of power must be foreign to our struggle.

On the economic and social level, too, there are many, many comrades who schedule activities, construction work, for example, then they sit on the sidelines. They make the people work, and their own laziness stands out so clearly that the people themselves become demoralized and demobilized. We must fight against this.

In addition, the CDRs' funds are often managed in an anarchic, muddled, fraudulent fashion or misappropriated. This is why it is legitimate to establish mechanisms for control of the funds. From now on, how much is in the account and what has been done with the money must be public knowledge. Even this is not enough. Many people have grown rich off the backs of CDR activists by declaring themselves to be CDR activists, a whole new brand of thieves.

Don't think for a minute that we in the National Council of the Revolution are not aware of these numerous shortcomings and failings that continue to undermine our CDRs. We are conscious of them and have a firm commitment to combating all these negative practices so harmful to the revolution.

This is, in fact, one of the reasons for holding this conference. The CDR activist should everywhere and at all times set a good example.

This is why, in saluting the small children who performed for us earlier, we were also saluting those who trained them and insured their development.

At the same time, we are pointing out that there are those in the provinces who are lagging behind. There are high commissioners and commanders, as well as regional governors, some of whom think they are still in the era of the Voulet-Chanoine column,⁴ others who think they haven't left the epoch of rural communal life.

All of this is bad. We must denounce and combat these people. As high commissioners we should lead our provinces on every level. We must be energetic and full of initiative, supporting innovation and organizing its implementation. If our thirty provinces organized thirty presentations like the one we've just seen, that would be good! We'd be making good progress. But this is not yet the case.

On the level of our civil service, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution still function very poorly. This is because the workers organized into these CDRs are chasing after privileges, titles, and power instead of improving the quality of the services, instead of seeking quantitatively and qualitatively to increase the production of social and economic wealth. These power-hungry gluttons must be combated. [Applause]

If we continue in this way, we run the risk of seeing bureaucracy take root in our services and administration. Twenty-five people want to sign "seen and passed on" on any given document — "seen and passed on," "seen and passed on." This adds absolutely nothing to the quality of the document. It's just that everyone wants to be sure to add their two cents. [Applause] The whole process is held up simply because a CDR official wants to be sure that people in town will say "Ah, yes, really comrade, thank you! It's really thanks to you." [Laughter] If you don't thank him and honor him with a few bows, he delays and blocks your document at will until you've understood the logic of the strongest.

We want nothing to do with these kinds of methods, because bureaucracy and bureaucrats are the worst enemy of our cause. As such, we must fight against them relentlessly and doggedly in all their forms.

Our offices are dirty and badly maintained despite the revolutionary days, revolutionary weeks, and soon the revolutionary months, years, decades, and centuries. They will continue to be dirty, badly organized, and maintained as long as we are unable to face up to our responsibilities and denounce what should be denounced.

I usually hold up certain places as examples of offices that are well

maintained and deserve congratulations. Everyone should look to their example, I won't list them all here. I don't want to create jealousies and I'll limit myself to listing them in the presidential residence. [Applause] This is what should be done!

How can it be that a revolutionary office has chairs that wobble, not because they weren't bought new, but because they've been used carelessly. There are officials and cadres who are scruffy, badly dressed, dirty like their own documents, [Laughter] lazy typists, and scatterbrained telephone operators. This is not worthy of a CDR and we must correct ourselves. Quality begins with accepting the truth. Let's look squarely at our weaknesses, be more conscious of them, and pledge to improve ourselves. Even better, we revolutionaries should always distinguish ourselves.

We could say a lot in criticism of elders who say they are members of the National Union of Elders of Burkina, or that they are now part of the revolution, but who forbid their children to go to CDR meetings; or about the husbands who prevent their wives from going to CDR meetings or who terrorize them. This must also be denounced. [Applause]

We must now move on to a much more conscious level of organization. The first days of the revolution were days of enthusiasm, euphoria — a festival. Now we must organize ourselves on a much more scientific, methodical level and make corrections every step of the way in order to go forward! We have seen examples elsewhere of the demise of other organizations similar to our CDRs — revolutionary committees, etc. Wherever such organizations have existed, there have been failures. In certain countries, reactionary forces have triumphed over these organizations. We must be conscious of our weaknesses. We must never cease to struggle — to struggle and to keep in mind that the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution signify above all courage, political courage, the courage to live up to our responsibilities.

We are not CDR members just so that we can shout slogans, but so that we can raise consciousness, act, and produce. This is why we should banish empty slogans — these futile and tiresomely repetitive and ultimately irritating slogans — from our demonstrations. You arrive at a demonstration and someone shouts, "Homeland or death, we will triumph!" twenty-five times. It's beginning to be a bit much [Laughter] especially when there's no solid, militant explanation along with it! It's just repetition. No, let's set aside the tape recorder CDRs! [Applause] We are just improvising slogans to fill up time, so you get "Down with thieves!" "Down with liars!" [Laughter] It's not

good! We should differentiate ourselves from folk theater troupes. At some shows we see crude scenes where comrades sometimes perform obscene dances. This is not revolutionary either. The revolution should have its sense of decency. [Applause]

We need to be critical of the lack of organization in our demonstrations. While we have scored victories in some areas, in others we haven't! Some of our ceremonies are tiresome and, though I don't condone the frequent absence of some of our ambassadors, I understand why they might not want to come! Well, we must put a stop to this.

We must even put a stop to certain kinds of praise that are poorly disguised and badly controlled expressions of feudal reflexes. This song, for example, "Oh, CNR, Thomas Sankara may he forever be president" is not good. [Applause] When you're president, you're president. When you're not, you're not. [Applause] We must be clear, this is not a good song. At this rate, in one or two years we'll find ourselves in celebrations with groups that are much more trained in this and who may have nothing other than this to do.

The CDRs are there to produce. Of course, if we need themes and slogans for our mobilizations, okay! If we need images and symbols to understand the revolution, we need them, and we won't hesitate to use them. But we must not mistake the form of the revolution for its content.

The success of the revolution cannot be measured by the number of slogans, by the number of tenors and basses who chant our slogans. The revolution's success will be measured by other standards, by the level of production. We must produce, this is essential. This is why I welcome the slogan advanced for the two million tons of grain.

Our country produces sufficient food to feed itself. We can even surpass our current production. But unfortunately, because of our own lack of organization, we are still forced to hold out our hands for food aid. This food aid is an obstacle to us, instilling in us and planting in our minds the habits and welfare reflexes of the beggar. We must do away with this aid through increased production!

We must succeed in producing more because it's natural that he who gives you food also calls the tune. When families kill the cock, the turkey, and the lambs for the Tabaski festivities, or at Easter or Christmas time, they should do so with the confidence that these have been well fattened and that they are free to kill them whenever they wish — at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, or even during Lent.

He who does not feed you can demand nothing of you. We, however, are being fed every day and every year. We say, "Down with imperialism!" yet we can't ignore our bellies. [*Laughter, applause*] Even though as revolutionaries we do not want our speech to reflect forms of domination, our stomachs are still there, pushing us to the right, onto the path of reaction and peaceful coexistence [*Applause*] with the help of all those who oppress us by means of the grain they pour into our country. Let us consume only what we ourselves control!

Many people ask, "Where is imperialism?" Look at your plates when you eat. These imported grains of rice, corn, and millet — that is imperialism. You need look no further. [*Applause*] So, comrades, we must organize to produce here at home and we can produce more than we need.

What's more, they say that it's due to the drought that our production has fallen. The minister of agriculture can tell you that even during the drought our cotton production continued to increase. Why? Because [the national textile company] SOFITEX pays.

Yes, we'll change our methods! But production is not limited only to grain. We have to produce in all areas, in the factories, in the offices. I invite all of you to participate in intellectual production. This conference correctly congratulated all those who wrote something, who produced something in the domain of literature and art, or whatever. This is production, we are revolutionaries!

I read in a telex, in an agency dispatch, that Burkina Faso was beaten by Nigeria and Liberia in the table tennis tournament. I thought this was good. We should be beaten again. But we were beaten this time because of all those who failed to organize adequately in the past years. If we are beaten in the years to come, comrades, it will be our own fault. [*Sustained applause*] So we must produce, produce, and produce some more.

On the intellectual level, many positive things are said but not written down. Let's take the example of the People's Revolutionary Courts. Can anyone quote me a book written by a Burkinabè on this subject? The little that has been written has been written by foreigners — students, university professors, researchers, etc. And yet there are many precious lessons to be learned from the people's courts that should be recorded in books. Ask our broadcasting station if they still have the tape recording of the fourteenth people's court. They will tell you that the tape has been used to record the latest hit song of some star or other.

This is not correct. We haven't developed the reflex of safeguard-

ing our intellectual capital. We must produce more in this area. After all, Burkina Faso must hold the record for production of underground literature. This country is where you'll find the greatest number of leaflets, as we well know! This proves that we know how to read and write. But Mamadou and Bineta grew up a very long time ago and are beginning to be somewhat old.⁵ [*Laughter, applause*]

Comrades, it is important to keep coming back on other occasions to what has not been accomplished and what still remains to be done. Unity — unity in our ranks! Unity, criticism, self-criticism, unity. Let's purge from our ranks all trace of beating around the bush and insidious opportunism that is brewing there visibly and invisibly; let's do away with slogans guided from afar by remote control. Fortunately, this conference has allowed us to see that our unity has been strengthened. This proves that healthy elements are at work consciously and loyally on all levels to consolidate our unity. It represents a real victory. [*Applause*]

Comrades, I want to congratulate you all for the efforts you have made, particularly leading up to the conference. Everything we have accomplished here in Burkina Faso has been accomplished above all thanks to the CDRs. We have built schools, houses, clinics, roads, bridges, and dams. We have carried out intellectual and artistic production. In short, we have advanced on many fronts. We have made sacrifices on the level of the economy, our finances, and our budget. Every one of us has paid the necessary price. I know that no one likes having portions of their salary withheld. Who in this mean world is ready to give up part of their wages except when necessity demands it?

The universe we evolve in and the forces that surround us are not conducive to independent development such as ours. To the contrary, all possible traps are laid to force us to prostitute ourselves in order to achieve a semblance of development. "Rely on our own resources" must cease to be merely a slogan — we must be obsessed with it. We must understand it as a principle that we always rely on our own resources. Sometimes this is difficult and we hear the defeatist alarm bells singing the praises of aid. Aid, no! Cooperation, yes! We need the cooperation of all the peoples of the entire world. But we really do not want aid that nurtures a welfare mentality in us. [*Applause*]

This is why we have made such a great effort and will continue to do so. Our efforts have been blocked and distorted by those who say, "There, you see, the revolution has lowered our salaries, our purchasing power is down, there are people who are being paid only twenty francs per month and why? Because of deductions." This is

quite an insult, comrades, a crude insult! We cannot fall into this trap. If there is someone who has only twenty francs per month because we have withheld 12 percent of that person's salary, what would this mean? It's serious. Those who have only twenty francs per month because we withheld 12 percent will be reimbursed 100 percent of their salary. This means that at the end of the month they will have 22.40 francs. Mathematically, this is what it means!

Let no one say that salaries have disappeared because of the Popular Investment Effort or other deductions. The salaries have disappeared on beer and kebabs, on offensive luxury and consumerism. [Applause] Those who drive around in cars bought on credit, the opportunists, those who go to marabouts to increase their money — those are the ones who no longer have their purchasing power.

Nevertheless, the revolution is for all of us and our efforts benefit us all. This is why we should mobilize for the budget meetings that are about to be held. Tell as many comrades as possible that these meetings will discuss measures along the same lines as those we have implemented to date. In particular, the meetings will underline the successful efforts made for the benefit of the people. This is why, starting with the next budget, there will be no more Popular Investment Effort. [Applause] The Popular Investment Effort will be abolished and full salaries will be reestablished. [Applause]

I know you don't like the idea of reestablishing full salaries. I know. But I understand how you feel. Isn't that right, comrades? [Shouts of "Yes!"] You're not being honest. You don't have the courage to state your opinion! Well, we are reestablishing salaries because the enormous effort we have made allows us to do so. We want to be frank with the people — never promise anything we cannot deliver. [Applause] There are countries where they promise wage increases that are never paid. We promised to withhold your salaries and we did — didn't we? [Shouts of "Yes!"] So we kept our word! [Applause]

We're not like other countries, that's the difference. When we say we are going to withhold salaries, we withhold them. And you all have concrete proof of that. If there is a single person here whose salary was not withheld, he should indicate this to the Budget Ministry. [Laughter]

The National Council of the Revolution intends to channel the fruits of these efforts into developing the country. This is possible, and we can do it because of the cohesion we've maintained, shoulder to shoulder. After this national CDR conference we should learn to fight our enemies without fear, pity, weakness, or useless sentiment-

tality! Every time we let ourselves be softened up by their tears, we are the ones who lose. Moussa Ngom shed tears and made a lot of others cry. But when children died at the hospital here for lack of 1,000 francs worth of medicine with which to treat them, everyone began to understand that 6 billion and some francs represents 6 million and some times we could have bought medicine for these children. Moussa Ngom's tears should not cause us to soften, [*Applause*] and if there is anyone here with a sensitive heart — a heart uselessly sensitive to the impact of the bourgeoisie, of reactionary forces, forces of the counterrevolution — he should make an effort to grow up.

Comrades, congratulations to all those who have traveled far, in particular from abroad, to be here at this conference. I wish you a good trip back to the countries where you are in search of knowledge of how to produce more for your country. I would like you to communicate to the comrades over there the National Council of the Revolution's message and the resolutions from this First National Conference of the CDRs in which you have been able to participate.

I wish those who came from our provinces near and far a good journey home, in order to spread the message of the National Council of the Revolution and the CDRs. I wish you a safe trip home, and urge you to exercise caution so that the accidents we've been experiencing will not recur and so that we lose no more comrades and equipment from such accidents.

We should take the opportunity here to note that we in the CDRs have not adequately maintained our equipment up to now. We have broken vehicles, pumps, generators, typewriters, loudspeakers, microphones, and even weapons. This is not good. From now on, we need better management of our equipment out of respect for the people, because this equipment was acquired by the people and belongs to the people. We should preserve it, and those who break vehicles must know that they are breaking the vehicles of the people, that they are showing contempt for and insulting the people when they do this.

Once more, congratulations to the CDR National General Secretariat for the important effort it made, as well as the national general secretary, who has moved forward amid adversity, ingratitude, and defamation, but who has effectively moved forward — an effectiveness that improves daily. [*Applause*]

So, our first national conference is drawing to a close. As it does, it opens the door to other national conferences and congresses, to the deepening and further radicalization of our revolution. So I encourage everyone now to think hard about the battles of the future. But I

encourage you, too, to practice genuine, conscious, and consistent militant activity.

I hereby declare this First National Conference of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution of Burkina closed.

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you.

Notes

1. This refers to the West African Economic Community-sanctioned trial by Burkina's People's Revolutionary Courts of Mohamed Diawara, Moussa Ngom, and Moussa Diakité in April 1986. These three prominent West African politicians had embezzled over 6 billion CFA francs from the CEAO. Diawara and Diakité were sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Ngom was sentenced to fifteen years with the possibility of release after ten years. They were ordered to pay back the stolen money.

2. On February 1, 1985, the National Council of the Revolution formally launched a campaign to begin constructing a rail line from Ouagadougou north to Tambao, a town near the border with Mali, using both government-employed construction workers and voluntary workers.

3. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were organized in all neighborhoods, workplaces, and military units. Those in the workplace were called service CDRs, regardless of the type of work done. Members frequently belonged to both a neighborhood CDR and a service CDR, but could hold office in only one.

4. Paul Voulet and Charles Chanoine were French officers who led the military campaign in 1896-97 to conquer the area of West Africa that is Burkina Faso today. They used extremely brutal methods to subdue the indigenous peoples.

5. These are characters used in elementary school books throughout French-speaking West Africa to teach reading. For each grade, the characters are one year older.

Burkina Will Be at Nicaragua's Side

August 27, 1986

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega headed a delegation to Burkina Faso at the end of August 1986. At a dinner on August 27, Sankara presented Ortega with the Gold Star of Nahouri, the highest revolutionary honor in Burkina. The text of Sankara's toast is translated from Sidwaya, August 29, 1986.

This visit by a leader of the Nicaraguan revolution to Burkina Faso is indeed an honor and an event of great political significance. As you know, Nicaragua is very far from Burkina — geographically and historically. Yet despite the thousands of kilometers that separate us, despite the language barrier, and despite the cultural differences, Comrade Daniel Ortega, president of the revolutionary Republic of Nicaragua, is here with us. We salute Comrade Ortega.

Comrade President:

Allow me first of all, on behalf of myself and the Burkinabè people, to welcome you and your delegation to the free African territory of Burkina Faso. It is with great pride and joy that I and the Burkinabè people welcome you today.

Comrade Ortega:

To those who ask themselves what interests Nicaragua and Burkina Faso might have in common, I would answer that the shared ideals of peace, justice, and liberty for the peoples of the world unite us across the oceans, the seas, and the continents, and that our two countries intend to join forces to safeguard and defend this ideal at a time when imperialism still arrogantly spreads its tentacles. Furthermore, a whole network of various ties and interests unite us, as developing countries, as members of the Group of Seventy-seven and the Nonaligned Movement, and simply as nations that have chosen the path of freedom and dignity.

Comrade President:

Neither Burkina nor Nicaragua can allow itself to accept the divi-

sion of the world into two, a division whereby those who do not pledge allegiance to the West are working for the East. We Nonaligned countries are of the opinion that the politics of blocs are harmful to world peace. We refuse to be the hinterlands of the West, just as we refuse to be the beachheads of the East. Though we are as willing to collaborate with one as with the other, we demand the right to our differences.

No one should expect us to sit by as indifferent spectators watching a football match played by the big powers, in which our most essential interests constitute the football. We too are actors in the international arena, and we have the right to choose a political and economic system true to our aspirations. We have the duty to fight for a more just and more peaceful world, regardless of the fact that we have neither large industrial cartels nor nuclear weapons.

It is for this reason, Comrade President, that you and I, together with our peoples, have chosen to condemn colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, racism, Zionism, and all forms of aggression, occupation, domination, and outside interference, no matter where they come from.

We condemn and fight apartheid in South Africa as we do Zionism in Palestine; we protest the aggression against Nicaragua as we protest that perpetrated against Libya and the Frontline States; we denounce the invasion of Grenada as we do the occupation of Namibia; and we will not cease doing so until these peoples obtain justice.

What is Nicaragua for us?

To answer that it is a country of the Americas would not be adequate. It would, by unforgivable omission, even be hiding the truth. Nicaragua represents first and foremost four centuries of the harshest colonial rule, one hundred years of gang warfare aimed at dividing the spoils, and fifty years of bloody and voracious dictatorship. Nicaragua is synonymous with struggle against domination, exploitation, and oppression, with struggle against foreign control, and with direct and open confrontation with imperialism and its local henchmen.

The men, women, and children of Nicaragua are fighting against this slavery, they always have, and they always will. They are close to three million — Marxists, intellectuals, peasants, believers and nonbelievers, bourgeois and rich men who love their homeland, and poor people too — fighting back against humiliation.

They are all *compañeros*, combatants, fighting and dying for the same ideal and writing the most beautiful and most noble pages in the great book of Latin American history.

Children have perished in combat; women have fallen after being tortured and raped; combatants have been mowed down; priests have had to interrupt mass in order to repel the enemies of the people with the help of the Kalashnikov rifle, which thus spat fire in the name of the progressive gospel.

Comrades, how difficult it is to be free!

Dear Nicaraguan brothers, we understand the suffering of your flesh and your soul. Yes, there are countries not smiled upon by chance. Sad Nicaragua, so far from God and so close to the United States — yes, under such conditions it is difficult to be born and live free.

But heroes die on their feet. They never say they are dying for their homeland. They simply die. And their blood fertilizes the soil of the revolution. Thus Sandino shed his blood, and the Sandinista revolution triumphed one summer day in 1979. The Sandinista National Liberation Front led the struggle of the Nicaraguan people to victory. On July 19, 1979, God passed through Nicaragua. This new dawn was hailed the world over — including by the United States. It was not enough to be born. Nicaragua had to live. How difficult it is to live free!

Why should the Nicaraguan people's celebration be disturbed and darkened by so much hostility?

With Nicaragua, an explosive situation developed in Latin America. The plots began. First there was talk of appeals to reason, then rumors of negotiations that were swept aside by threats and abuse. Public opinion in North America became troubled and divided.

The Nicaraguan regime was denounced as Marxist-Leninist. They cried another Cuba. The campaign to discredit Nicaragua unfolded. They called it a dictatorship and invented destabilization efforts by Nicaragua against its neighbors, claiming, in order to whip up hate, that Nicaragua was being manipulated from the outside.

So the Somozaists and their guards were revived. In Nicaragua they are called *las bestias*, *los perros*, that is, beasts, dogs. They were aided by massive infusions of dollars. They were even sheltered, trained, and equipped by neighboring sister republics. The counterrevolution was institutionalized. And there you have the *contras* — a new race of terrorist carnivores.

From time to time there was a lull. There were hopes it would last forever. But the fire continued to smolder and flared up anew.

To live free, simply to believe in a better future — this is not easy when you are Nicaraguan. This is why the Burkinabè people sing this poem with you — a poem born not from poetic inspiration but from

our revolutionary commitment to say what we think.

The imperialists are prowling.
 From the bowels of the earth afire with revolt
 Arise the protests of a determined people
 For each day is a day of struggle,
 Of combat proclaiming the enemy's downfall.
 But the price is heavy
 Rivers of blood are spilled daily.
 Mothers have wept, their young ones dead at the front.
 Children have buried their fathers
 Groping in this darkness wrought by the *contras*.
 Babies have lost their pacifiers,
 Grasping instead the Kalashnikovs,
 And growing up quickly.
 White bridal veils stained with blood
 A sign of the times for patriotic priests.
 How hard it is to live free and be Nicaraguan.
 How sweet it is to die for our brother humans.
 Nicaragua will be victorious.
 Already people can read and write,
 Fend for themselves and cultivate the fields,
 Rediscovering how to smile.
 The revolution will triumph.
 As for the *contras*, *no pasarán!*
 Your land, our land, will know true manna
 Because of our genius.
 At Nicaragua's side will be Burkina.
 For the revolution is invincible and the people will reign.
 From the depths of the calm fragrant earth then will arise
 The fraternal cries
 Of a perfect symphony.

It is for all these reasons, comrades, that I have the honor and the pleasure of presenting you, in the name of the Burkinabè people, with this symbol of our pride in you.

Free homeland or death!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Ours Is a Seething Anti-Apartheid, Anti-Zionist Dream

September 3, 1986

Sankara spoke at the Eighth Summit Conference of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, held in Harare, Zimbabwe, on September 3, 1986. This speech is translated from Carrefour africain, September 12, 1986.

Given that Harare was chosen as its location, our eighth conference has an obligation to respond to the liberation movements' expectations. This is why this summit conference must be conducted under the theme of the hour, that is, the close relationship between nonalignment and the concrete demands of the liberation movements, especially with regard to alliances and support.

The experience of the struggle of peoples throughout the world demonstrates every day that we can and must be nonaligned, even if by necessity we have received heavy backing in our struggle from powerful countries and states. To do this successfully, we must be armed with an ideology whose political line is consistent and fundamentally correct and can assure that our struggles will be waged correctly.

There are three dimensions to this liberation struggle: the anticolonial, the anti-imperialist, and the class-struggle dimension.

Those who won their independence were successful in doing so because they waged a struggle against colonialism. Their independence became real only when it was understood that subsequent battles must be waged against neocolonialism and imperialism. We believe that the world is divided into two antagonistic camps: the camp of the exploiters and the camp of the exploited. In principle, every national liberation struggle — as a struggle in the interests of the people — forms part of the camp of the exploited. Alliances are naturally and automatically established among all countries and regimes that are on the side of the people. But this is not sufficient to protect coun-

tries from new bondage. We must be able to look beyond this and maintain a permanent struggle. We can receive help without becoming subjugated. We can forge alliances and remain independent and nonaligned. We can proclaim ourselves part of the same school of thought as others while preserving our autonomy. This is our deep conviction.

Comrade President;

Excellencies;

Comrades;

Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to salute the memory of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who gave me an exceptional opportunity to speak about my conception of nonalignment and, above all, to receive some valuable advice from her. Today, I miss her.

Being among the youngest here in age and seniority, I feel a duty to bring you the feelings of a youth of this world, a Third World youth, an African youth, a youth of Burkina Faso. I would like to explain here the thinking of all those like me who, in their childhood, heard about the Nonaligned Movement and who, in their adolescence, proclaimed fanatically that the Nonaligned Movement was a force with which colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and racism could be confronted and that the Nonaligned Movement was a rumbling force akin to a volcano that would soon set the earth afire and create a new international order.

It is now 1986 and my eighteenth birthday is long since dead and buried. My country's history has placed me among the leaders of the Nonaligned Movement. Nonalignment is already twenty-five years old. Today, a feeling rather of disappointment, failure, and frustration has displaced the certainty, the enthusiastic promise of victory and hopeful satisfaction. Perhaps this is called realism and reality. If so, how sad reality is! I prefer the dream! For this was the dream that made possible the most insane boldness of that era. And it was this madness that enabled men to rise up against the barbarism of colonialism, to believe in victory, and actually triumph.

Of course, not all the anticolonial victories were won after the formation of the Nonaligned Movement. Many obtained their independence — in whatever form — well before the birth of the Nonaligned Movement. But fundamentally the philosophy of multifaceted struggle that resulted in independence was nothing other than the application of the general principles of the Nonaligned Movement.

The dream that brought to life the Nonaligned Movement was this morally just and scientifically logical undertaking, which has given

birth to projects such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the New International Economic Order. Even though these undertakings were born with certain reformist limitations, it still remains true that the utopia of some, combined with the great pragmatic caution of others, produced beneficial results. The association of these two currents resulted in strengthening the fight for an order in which economic relations would cease to be always unfavorable to our peoples.

The bold dream we prefer is that seething antiracist, anti-apartheid, anti-Zionist fervor that led us all to believe at one time that the death knell had sounded for the racial fascism that relegated our brothers in the diaspora on every continent to the status of beasts of burden. This same racial fascism was institutionalized in the Middle East to the misfortune of the Palestinian people, subjecting them to the most vicious denial of justice. Not far from here this fascism sustains the Nazism of our epoch, with Pieter Botha and his superstructure in the role of Hitler and blacks — always blacks — in the role of non-Aryans!

The Nonaligned Movement signifies this awakening and this refusal to be the grass that fighting elephants trample with impunity. Our movement is the force they are obliged to respect and must take into account. It is the recovery of our dignity.

But today we surprise ourselves by wanting to cry out, "Tito, Nehru, Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, wake up, the Nonaligned Movement is dying!" We want to say to them with all the strength of our lungs and faith, "Help us. Namibia is still occupied, the Palestinian people are still searching for a home, and we are being traumatized by the foreign debt." Who would dare deny it?

Can't we see that the Palestinians are becoming more and more dispersed, and that they are now being attacked and bombed even in the sovereign states that had the goodwill to welcome them thousands of kilometers away from the zones of their territory at high risk of bombardment. The Nonaligned Movement has not yet won the reinstatement of the Palestinians' rights. The Palestine Liberation Organization's acceptance as a member of the Nonaligned Movement no longer has the same soothing effect on these brothers, who have been wandering for decades and who can tell us only where they spent the last night, never where they will spend the next! And this has been going on for a long time. The Palestinians, too, expect ultimate protection from the Nonaligned Movement.

In South Africa and Namibia, blacks continue to be treated as slaves in their reservations. An expression used the world over says

that there is no place like home. This is not the case for our brothers in South Africa. Blacks are not at home in their country. It is the only country in the world that also serves as a collective prison. If you are born black, you must flee South Africa in order to breathe the air of freedom.

They, too, had faith in the Nonaligned Movement. The Nonaligned Movement's support, along with that of others, spurred them on. They came out of their townships to confront the racists. Alas, they died in ever-greater numbers. After the whites' clubs and police dogs, came the tear gas and exploding bullets of guns that have now become basic instruments of racist oppression.

So where is the Nonaligned Movement? What is the Nonaligned Movement doing? We are here in Harare, just an hour's flight from Pieter Botha's bunker, the headquarters of Nazism. We are not far from the housing complexes where mothers bury the children who have been mowed down by the bullets of whites, and where coffins are lowered into the ground every day as a result of the repression.

Yes, outside the walls of this majestic and secure conference hall there is death for all those who are not white; and there is moral suffering for all those who, even though they are not black, hold ideals opposed to the classification of men according to the color of their skin.

Yes, in leaving here, just a few steps away, we would find a world where death is the supreme deliverance, the only remaining road to freedom!

And what are we doing?

Will we continue to whip up our brothers in South Africa with our fiery speeches and deceive them as to our determination, thus rashly throwing them up against the racist hordes, knowing very well that we have done nothing to create a relationship of forces favorable to blacks? Isn't it criminal to exacerbate struggles in which we do not participate?

And what about our duty toward the Frontline States — this living rampart that protects us from the wild beasts of South Africa? Have we done our duty as nonaligned fighters? This country has been bombed and other Frontline States are subjected to periodic military or economic attack, either directly or through intermediary bandits. What is the Nonaligned Movement doing?

By meeting here in Harare we are, of course, expressing our solidarity with all those struggling in South Africa and in the Frontline States. But let us not forget that we are thereby enraging the racists who will focus their vindictive anger against those whom we will

soon abandon. What will we do then? Send messages of support, compassion, and condemnation? No! That will not return the murdered children to their mothers, nor will it repair this country's sabotaged economy!

What will we do if, because of our highly threatening speeches, Pieter Botha sends his bombers against Zimbabwe when we leave here, because Zimbabwe is guilty of the impertinence of hosting such a unanimously anti-apartheid summit conference? It would be futile to heap praise and congratulations on Robert Mugabe. Protection is much more what he and all the other Frontline States need.

The Nonaligned Movement also signifies our struggle for development. The terrible problem of the debt is riding roughshod over our economies. Each day, under threat from our creditors, we have looked to the Nonaligned Movement in vain. So each one of us has tried to ease his plight in his own way. Some talk about paying back the debt but plead for a moratorium; others decide to declare a unilateral moratorium; yet others judge that the debt is unpayable. In fact, we are repaying everything just as the capitalists wish, because we are disunited.

We must be able to say no! Paying back the debt is not a moral choice to be made out of supposed respect for obligations. It is a concrete question to be resolved concretely. Objectively, we cannot continue to pay it back. This is an elementary calculation that can be clearly demonstrated. So let us stop paying individually for our docility, let us stop negotiating with our creditors by betraying our brothers, secretly hoping that in this way we will be given some bonuses. After all, such bonuses are the wages of indignity, of shame, and of betrayal. From both a moral and logical point of view, they are an expression of our low level of understanding of economic questions. They are futile sacrifices. We must resist together, collectively. What is the Nonaligned Movement doing?

All these questions can only lead us to ask ourselves what strength the Nonaligned Movement has today, now that the Titos, Nehrus, Nassers, and Kwame Nkrumahs are gone.

I won't go on by citing the fratricidal conflicts between member states of the Nonaligned Movement that we still have not been able to resolve; or the punitive assaults against Grenada, Libya, and the Frontline States; or the drought that is ruining the fragile economies of certain countries here; or the migrating locusts that make us wonder whether drought without locusts or rain with locusts is preferable; or the cyclones that inevitably devastate the coastal regions of some countries here each year!

Faced with all this we are tempted to call on the founding fathers for help. Yet that is not a solution. First, because I want to take my distance from messianism — there are no prophets or messiahs for whom we can wait. Reality must be faced. Second, because I am confident that the historical laws of humanity's development are producing contradictions, and that these very contradictions are the bearers of radical solutions.

This is why, while not hiding the disappointment I spoke of earlier, I am pleased to note the degree of confidence in the struggle generated by an accurate assessment of the situation.

It is true that the Nonaligned Movement faces increasing difficulties. Our united front has been cracked open. Our combativity has been blunted. No one fears our movement today. We must recover the movement's dynamism, while stripping our founding fathers' enthusiasm of the romanticism and lyricism that were so understandable given the reality of the time.

Comrade President;

Excellencies;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Comrades:

Burkina Faso is a small, landlocked country in West Africa. We remain a member of the Nonaligned Movement because it is in our interests to do so, and because the principles of the movement are in harmony with our revolutionary beliefs.

We have come to Harare to seek solutions to the problems of security, peace, good neighborliness, economic cooperation, the foreign debt, and, finally, in the hope of escaping from the humiliation of small countries by large ones that have only contempt for the wisdom of those nations that reject the idea that might makes right. Can the Nonaligned Movement help me in this today, or must we wait another twenty-five years?

Burkina Faso is a country that refuses to be classified forever among the poorest of the poor. One of the obstacles to my country's development is the notorious question of the foreign debt. Burkina is aware that this debt — this infernal trap — was proposed, no, imposed on it by people who today, in our opinion, have reached such a level of intransigence and cynicism that only their wallets understand them. Burkina Faso knows that the foreign debt is a vicious cycle in which they want to ensnare us. We are supposed to go into debt in order to pay the debt, going further into debt. Burkina Faso wants to put an end to this situation. Yet we know that alone we can do nothing or practically nothing. We need at least fifteen other

countries in order to resist collectively and win.

The Nonaligned Movement includes more than one hundred members! When the poor mobilize themselves as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) did, they will be able to impose their law on the rich. And you can be sure that this will be the law of justice, and that the world economy will then reorganize itself. Twenty-five years have passed since we first spoke of the New International Economic Order. Are we to go through another twenty-five years of vain pleading?

Disarmament, peace, and nonalignment are closely interrelated concepts for the Nonaligned. One cannot sincerely want one without fighting for the others.

A prerequisite for development is an end to famine, ignorance, and disease. This is why we hope that International Literacy Day, celebrated on September 8 every year, will be an occasion for profound reflection by all sincere members of our movement. Illiteracy must be placed among the ills we aim to eliminate as soon as possible from the face of our planet so that better days may be in store for our peoples. This is why the activities of UNESCO are and will remain irreplaceable.

Behind our instability and incapacity to adhere to our principles lie both the objective weakness of our movement, the current international relationship of forces, and the real pressures exerted by the imperialist powers that control from afar the positions of certain of the theoretically independent and Nonaligned countries. These same weaknesses make the choice of host for the Ninth Summit a nightmare for those who reject nonalignment and fall in behind those powers that mine the territorial waters of others, bomb towns, invade neighboring territories, impose some political regimes and depose others, and finance movements created, organized, and trained by themselves simply because they are the strongest.

Burkina Faso could have been a candidate to host the Ninth Summit. It is not a lack of reception facilities or the unwritten rule of rotating continents that hold us back. We believe, simply, that another people has suffered more than we, and is therefore more deserving to host the next summit. Nicaragua, more than any other country today, knows the price of nonalignment. It pays daily in blood and sweat for its courageous choices.

If the conferences of the nonaligned contribute to the struggle for victory of those countries that host them, then we will undoubtedly reconvene in Managua in order to support and strengthen Nicaragua in its struggle and allow it finally to guarantee its farmers the ability

to farm in peace, allow its children to go to school without fear of counterrevolutionary attack, and permit all of its inhabitants to pass their nights peacefully.

The Nonaligned Movement must survive and win. Thousands of men and women are investing their hopes in it. Yesterday, generations of Third World youth watched the movement's birth with euphoria and passion. The disappointment came only later. Let us see to it that future generations who know less about our movement will discover it through the victories we accumulate.

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Thank you.

Samora Machel's Death Must Enlighten and Strengthen Us

October 1986

Mozambican President Samora Machel was killed October 19, 1986, in a plane crash over South African territory under mysterious circumstances. Sankara's speech in Ouagadougou on Machel's death is translated from the October 31, 1986, issue of Carrefour africain.

Our task today is not to weep, but to adopt a revolutionary attitude as we face the tragic situation brought about by Samora Machel's disappearance. If we weep, we open ourselves up to sentimentality, and sentimentality is not capable of interpreting death. Sentimentality belongs to the messianic vision of the world that expects a single man to transform the universe. Mourning, discouragement, and dependency follow as soon as this individual disappears from the earth.

Another reason why we should not weep is so that we are not confused with hypocrites the world over — the crocodiles and dogs — who make believe that they are saddened by Samora Machel's death. We know very well who is sad and who is pleased that this fighter is gone. We have no intention of taking part in the competition among cynics who decree so and so many days of mourning, each one trying to assure us of his grief and attempting to demonstrate it by shedding tears, tears that we revolutionaries must be able to see for what they are.

Samora Machel is dead. His death must serve to enlighten and strengthen us as revolutionaries in the sense that the enemies of our revolution, the enemies of the peoples of the world, have revealed yet another of their tactics and traps. We have discovered that the enemy is capable of killing combatants even when they are in the air — that it can take advantage of a single moment's inattention on our part to commit its odious crimes.

The only goal of this direct and barbaric aggression is to disorganize the political leadership of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) and definitively jeopardize the Mozambican people's struggle, thus putting an end to the hopes of an entire people — of more than one people, of all peoples. Confronted with this, we must draw the lessons together with our brothers of Mozambique.

We say to imperialism and to all our enemies that every time they carry out such actions they will be teaching us lessons. These lessons may not come free, but they will be adequate for us to learn what we deserve to know. Yesterday, the enemies of the people and of our liberty thought they were doing well — they thought they had been successful — when they killed Eduardo Mondlane in such a cowardly, barbaric, and treacherous fashion. They hoped that this would cause the liberation struggle's flag to fall in the dirt and that the people would take fright and give up the fight forever.

But they were forgetting the people's determination and will to free themselves. They were forgetting the special force that men have within them that makes them say no despite the bullets and the traps. They were forgetting the fearless Frelimo combatants.

These were the conditions in which Samora Machel dared to pick up the flag that Eduardo Mondlane, whose memory is still with us, had carried. Machel immediately became a leader, a force, a star that guided and lit the way. He knew how to help others benefit from his internationalism. He not only fought in Mozambique, but elsewhere, too, and for others.

We should ask ourselves a question today. Who killed Samora Machel? There is talk of investigations being held and experts meeting to determine the cause of Machel's death. South Africa, with the help of the imperialist media, is already attempting to pass off its theory of an accident. Lightning is supposed to have struck the plane and brought it down. Pilot error supposedly took the plane off course.

Without being pilots or experts in aeronautics, there is one question of logic we should ask ourselves: how could a plane flying at such high altitude suddenly graze the trees, that is, come within 200 meters of the earth and flip over?

They tell us that the number of survivors is proof that this was an accident and not an assassination attempt. But comrades, how can a plane's passengers — wakened so brutally by the impact — say how and why their plane flipped over and crashed.

In our opinion, this event is purely and simply a continuation of the racist policies of South African whites. It is another manifestation

of imperialism. To know who killed Samora Machel we have only to ask ourselves who is rejoicing, and who has an interest in seeing him dead? In answer to this we find, side by side and hand in hand, first the racist whites of South Africa, whom we have never stopped denouncing. By their side we find the puppets, the armed bandits of the MNR, the so-called Mozambique National Resistance. This movement is in resistance to what? To the liberation of the Mozambican people, to their march to freedom, and to the internationalism that Mozambique brings, through Frelimo, to other peoples.

Likewise, we find the Jonas Savimbis. He was supposed to go to Europe and we protested against him. We told the Europeans, in particular France, that if they established an entry visa in order to fight terrorism, if they are looking for terrorists, well, they have found one: Jonas Savimbi.

By their side we find the African traitors who allow arms for use against the peoples of Africa to pass through their countries. We find elements who occasionally talk about peace but who are constantly using all their capacities and energy to help support traitors to the African cause.

These are the people who assassinated Samora Machel. Alas, we Africans delivered Samora Machel up to his enemies by not giving him the support he deserved. In fact, when Mozambique answered the call by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and broke all relations with South Africa, who in the OAU supported it? In spite of the fact that Mozambique — economically tied to South Africa — was experiencing enormous difficulties, Mozambique resisted and fought alone against South Africa. This is why we Africans within the OAU carry a heavy responsibility for Samora Machel's disappearance.

Our speeches of today will never count for anything as long as we do not try to be more consistent in our resolutions of the future. Burkina Faso put forward this view in Harare. We said it is not sufficient to applaud Robert Mugabe and put him forward as the Nonaligned Movement's worthy son if, a few hours after our departure, South Africa starts to bomb Zimbabwe, and we all stay snugly at home in our capitals, content to send messages of support.

Some countries applauded us. Others felt we were going too far. But history has proven us right. Shortly after the Nonaligned summit, South Africa has carried out its dirty deed. And here we are, simply issuing verbal condemnations.

It is imperialism that organizes and orchestrates all these misfortunes. Imperialism armed and trained the racists; imperialism sold

them the radar equipment and the fighter planes to track and strike down Samora Machel's plane. It is the imperialists who placed their puppets in Africa to communicate the information as to when his plane would take off, and when it would pass over their territory. And it is they who today are still trying to take advantage of the situation by involving themselves in the choice of Samora Machel's successor. It is they who try to divide the Mozambican combatants by categorizing them as moderates or extremists.

Samora Machel was a great friend of our revolution and a great source of support. He said so everywhere and demonstrated it in his attitude toward Burkinabè delegations. We had our first contact with him through his writings on revolution. We read and studied his works and were in intellectual communication with him. Our second contact was in New Delhi at the Nonaligned Summit Conference. He told us he was following the situation in our country but was worried by imperialism's will to dominate.

We met him twice in Addis Ababa, where we were able to discuss with him. We had great admiration for this man who never bowed his head — not even after the Nkomati accord, whose tactical significance he fully understood, even though certain opportunist elements tried to use the accords against him, making him out to be a coward. The Burkinabè delegation took the floor to say that as long as they had not taken up arms and gone to fight in South Africa, those who were attacking Mozambique had no right to speak.

We supported him a great deal, but he, too, supported us. At the last OAU summit, when Burkina's position was under attack by certain states, Machel took the floor and said that if these people didn't have "the courage and gratitude to applaud Burkina Faso, they should at least have some shame and keep quiet."

We met him again at his home in Maputo. He helped us greatly to understand the extremely difficult internal and external situation in which he found himself. And everyone here knows the role Samora Machel played among the Frontline States.

We saw him again at the last Nonaligned summit in Harare where we had numerous conversations with him. Samora Machel knew he was one of imperialism's targets and had made a commitment to visit Burkina Faso in 1987. We agreed to exchange delegations from our Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, from the army, from our ministries, etc.

But all this should teach us valuable lessons. We must close ranks and march hand in hand with fellow revolutionaries because there are other plots lying in wait for us and other crimes in preparation.

Comrades, I would like to invite all of you to send, along with your good wishes, this medal, this honorary distinction, that we will take to Mozambique to confer on Samora Machel. We will bring him the highest distinction in revolutionary Burkina Faso because we think that his work contributed and continues to contribute to the progress of our revolution. He therefore deserves this award of the Gold Star of Nahouri.

At the same time, I invite you to name streets and buildings, etc., after Samora Machel all across the country, because he deserves it. Posterity must remember this man and all that he did for his own and other peoples. Thus we will have concretized his memory in Burkina so that others will always remember him. Comrades, we are gathered here today to think about Samora Machel's disappearance. Tomorrow we must go on to victory.

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Nicaragua Must Be Supported by All of Us

November 8, 1986

On November 8, 1986, Sankara spoke at a rally of 200,000 people in Managua, Nicaragua, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the tenth anniversary of the death of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca. Sankara spoke on behalf of the 180 international delegations invited by the FSLN to participate in the anniversary activities. This speech appeared in the Militant, November 28, 1986, published in New York.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome we have received here in Managua. I also want to express the pride we feel in speaking in the name of all the foreign delegations. We come from far away, some from very far away, thousands of miles away. But what is important is what unites us with the Nicaraguans, who are so different from us, apart from the color of our skin.

What unites us with Nicaragua, which is so far from us? It is not geographical distance. We are united in establishing the freedom and well-being of the people. We are united to establish justice for the people. And we are united because we are resolute in the face of the enemies of the people.

All the delegations here measure the strength of the struggle of the Nicaraguan people. We from around the world join your struggle. Throughout the entire world, we certainly admire your struggle. Your struggle is just. It is just, because it is anti-imperialist. It is just, because it is against the oppressors and the assassins of the people. Your struggle is just, because it is against colonialism. And your struggle is just, because it is the struggle of all the peoples of the world.

The Palestinian people fight for freedom and happiness. The Namibian people fight for their independence. Many of our peoples around the world are fighting for their freedom. In Africa, we are di-

rectly confronting colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism. The fascists and racists who exist in South Africa created apartheid against the blacks. The struggle against apartheid is not only the struggle of black people; it is the fight of all the peoples who want to live free and united. This struggle belongs to all the peoples of the world, and we Africans demand the participation of everyone. The people and the leaders who do not participate in the struggle against apartheid are traitors. They are traitors because yesterday the Africans shed their blood to fight against Nazism, for the benefit of the peoples of Europe and elsewhere. Today, it is a question of shedding blood against apartheid and for the well-being of our peoples.

Comrades, I would like to ask you to observe a minute of silence in remembrance of Samora Machel, that great fighter for African freedom.

I thank you.

We say that the struggle of the Nicaraguan people must be supported by each one of us throughout the world. We must support Nicaragua because if Nicaragua is destroyed, it would be a breach in the well-being of the other peoples of the entire world. This is why we must wage a political and diplomatic struggle to support Nicaragua. We must support Nicaragua economically. We must popularize the struggle of the Nicaraguan people throughout the world. And here we must congratulate all the peoples throughout the world who support Nicaragua, whether they are the countries of the Contadora Group, the countries of the Contadora Support Group, parties, organizations, or other international organizations that have decided to support the just cause of Nicaragua. You all have my congratulations, because imperialism has many and varied maneuvers to try to stop you from supporting the Nicaraguans.

Nicaraguan comrades, today we celebrate together the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. Today we also salute the memory of Carlos Fonseca. The only way and the best way for each one of you to pay tribute to Carlos Fonseca is for the entire people to see to it that every square centimeter of Nicaragua becomes a square centimeter of dignity and freedom.

The *contras* must be destroyed. The *contras* are stinking corpses that must be destroyed. The *contras* are jackals that do not deserve any respect. The *contras* are people who have sold their hearts to serve imperialism. But you, you have the duty of standing up to the bombardments, the mining of your ports, and against economic pressures. It is the duty of each Nicaraguan to repulse imperialism's puppets and marionettes, the *contras*.

We want to take the time to thank you in the name of revolutionary Burkina Faso. We want to thank you in the name of all the progressive and revolutionary countries that are represented here. Likewise, we want to thank you in the name of all the fraternal parties that are here.

Together with you, we say: Down with imperialism! Down with colonialism! Down with neocolonialism! Down with the exploiters of the people! Down with the enemies of Nicaragua!

Long live the Sandinista National Liberation Front!

Eternal life to Carlos Fonseca!

Eternal glory to the revolutionary friendship between the peoples!

No pasarán!

No pasarán!

No pasarán!

Muchas gracias.

The Revolution Cannot Triumph Without the Emancipation of Women

March 8, 1987

Sankara spoke to thousands of women from throughout the country at the March 8, 1987, International Women's Day celebration held in Ouagadougou. This translation, including the subheadings, is based on a pamphlet published in Ouagadougou in 1987.

It is not an everyday occurrence for a man to speak to so very many women at once. Nor does it happen every day that a man suggests to so many women new battles to be joined. A man experiences his first bashfulness the minute he becomes conscious that he is looking at a woman. So, sisters, you will understand that despite the joy and the pleasure it gives me to be speaking to you, I still remain a man who sees in every one of you a mother, a sister, or a wife.

I hope, too, that our sisters here from Kadiogo Province who do not understand French — the foreign language in which I will be giving my speech — will be patient with us, as they always have been. After all, it is they who, like our mothers, accepted the task of carrying us for nine months without a complaint. [*Sankara then explains in the Mooré language that these women would receive a translation.*]

Comrades, the night of August 4 gave birth to an achievement that was most beneficial for the Burkinabè people. It gave our people a name and our country new horizons. Imbued with the invigorating sap of freedom, the men of Burkina, the humiliated and outlawed of yesterday, received the stamp of what is most precious in the world: honor and dignity. From this moment on, happiness became accessible. Every day we advance toward it, heady with the first fruits of our struggles, themselves proof of the great strides we have already taken. But this selfish happiness is an illusion. There is something crucial missing: woman. She has been excluded from this joyful procession.

Though our men have already reached the edges of this great garden that is the revolution, our women are still confined within the shadows of anonymity. Among themselves, in voices loud or soft, they talk of the hopes that have embraced Burkina — hopes that are, for them, still merely fine words. The revolution's promise is already a reality for men. But for women, it is still merely a rumor. And yet the authenticity and the future of our revolution depend on women.

These are vital and essential questions, because nothing whole, nothing definitive or lasting could be accomplished in our country, as long as a crucial part of ourselves is kept in this condition of subjugation — a condition imposed in the course of centuries by various systems of exploitation.

Starting now, the men and women of Burkina Faso should profoundly change their image of themselves. For they are part of a society that is not only establishing new social relations but is also provoking a cultural transformation, upsetting the relations of authority between men and women and forcing each to rethink the nature of both.

This task is formidable but necessary. For it will determine our ability to bring our revolution to its full stature, unleash its full potential, and show its true meaning for the direct, natural, and necessary relations between men and women, the most natural of all relations between people. This will show to what extent the natural behavior of man has become human and to what extent he has realized his human nature.

This human being, this vast and complex combination of pain and joy; solitary and forsaken, yet creator of all humanity; suffering, frustrated, and humiliated, and yet endless source of happiness for each one of us; this source of affection beyond compare, inspiring the most unexpected courage; this being called weak, but possessing untold ability to inspire us to take the road of honor; this being of flesh and blood and of spiritual conviction — this being, women, is you. You are our mothers and life companions, our comrades in struggle, and because of this fact you should by rights assert yourselves as equal partners in the joyful victory feasts of the revolution.

It is in this light that all of us, men and women, must define and affirm the role and place of women in society. Therefore, we must restore to man his true image by making the reign of freedom prevail over differentiations imposed by nature and by eliminating all kinds of hypocrisy that sustain the shameless exploitation of women.

Posing the question of women in Burkinabè society today means posing the abolition of the system of slavery to which they have been

subjected for millennia. The first step is to try to understand how this system works, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order then to work out a line of action that can lead to women's total emancipation.

In other words, in order to win this battle that men and women have in common, we must be familiar with all aspects of the woman question on a world scale and here in Burkina. We must understand how the struggle of the Burkinabè woman is part of a worldwide struggle of all women and, beyond that, part of the struggle for the full rehabilitation of our continent. Thus, women's emancipation is at the heart of the question of humanity itself, here and everywhere. The question is thus universal in character.

The class struggle and the worldwide status of women

We undoubtedly owe it to dialectical materialism for having shed the greatest light on the problem of the conditions women face, allowing us to understand the exploitation of women as part of a general system of exploitation.

Dialectical materialism defines human society not as a natural, unchangeable fact, but as something working on nature. Humankind does not submit passively to the power of nature. It takes control over this power. This process is not an internal or subjective one. It takes place objectively in practice, once women cease to be viewed as mere sexual beings, and we look beyond their biological functions and become conscious of their weight as an active social force.

What is more, woman's consciousness of herself is not only a product of her sexuality. It reflects her position as determined by the economic structure of society, which in turn expresses the level reached by humankind in technological development and relations between classes. The importance of dialectical materialism lies in having gone beyond essential biological limits and simplistic theories about our being slaves to nature and having laid out the facts in their social and economic context.

From the first beginnings of human history, man's mastering of nature has never been accomplished with his bare hands alone. The hand with the opposable thumb reaches out for the tool, which increases the hand's power. It was thus not physical attributes alone — musculature or the capacity to give birth, for example — that determined the unequal status of men and women. Nor was it technological progress as such that institutionalized this inequality. In certain cases, in certain parts of the globe, women were able to eliminate the

physical difference that separated them from men.

It was rather the transition from one form of society to another that served to institutionalize women's inequality. This inequality was produced by our own minds and intelligence in order to develop a concrete form of domination and exploitation. The social function and role to which women have been relegated ever since is a living reflection of this fact. Today, her childbearing functions and the social obligation to conform to models of elegance determined by men prevent any woman who might want to from developing a so-called male musculature.

For millennia, from the Paleolithic to the Bronze Age, relations between the sexes were, in the opinion of the most skilled paleontologists, positive and complementary in character. So it was for eight millennia! As Frederick Engels explained to us, relations were based on collaboration and interaction, in contrast to the patriarchy, where women's exclusion was a generalized characteristic of the epoch. Engels traced the evolution of technology but also of the historic enslavement of women, which occurred with the appearance of private property, when one mode of production gave way to another, and when one form of social organization replaced another.

With the intensive labor required to clear the forests, cultivate the fields, and put the natural resources to best use, a division of labor developed. Self-interest, laziness, indolence, in short, taking the most for oneself with the least effort, emerged from the depths of the human spirit and become elevated into principles.

The protective tenderness of women toward the family and the clan became a trap that delivered her up to domination by the male. Innocence and generosity fell victim to deceit and base motives. Love was made a mockery of and human dignity scorned. All genuine human feelings were transformed into objects of barter. From this moment on, women's hospitality and desire to share were overpowered by cunning and treachery.

Though conscious of this treachery, which imposed on her an unequal share of the burdens, the woman followed the man in order to care for all that she loved. For his part, the man exploited her great self-sacrifice to the hilt. Later, this seed of criminal exploitation was set in terrible social imperatives, going far beyond the conscious concessions made by the woman, historically betrayed.

Humankind first knew slavery with the advent of private property. Man, master of his slaves and of the land, became in addition the woman's master. This was the historic defeat of the female sex. It came about with the upheaval in the division of labor and as a result

of new modes of production and a revolution in the means of production. In this way, paternal right replaced maternal right. Property was now handed down from father to son, rather than as before from the woman to her clan. The patriarchal family made its appearance, founded on the sole and personal property of the father, who had become head of the family. Within this family the woman was oppressed. Reigning supreme, the man satisfied his sexual whims by mating with his slaves or courtesans.

Women became his booty, his conquest in trade. He profited from their labor power and took his fill from the myriad of pleasures they afforded him. For their part, as soon as the masters gave them the chance, women took revenge in infidelity. Thus adultery became the natural counterpart to marriage. It was the woman's only form of self-defense against the domestic slavery to which she was subjected. Her social oppression was a direct reflection of her economic oppression.

Given this cycle of violence, inequality can be done away with only by establishing a new society, where men and women will enjoy equal rights, resulting from an upheaval in the means of production and in all social relations. Thus, the status of women will improve only with the elimination of the system that exploits them. In fact, throughout the ages and wherever the patriarchy has triumphed, there has been a close parallel between class exploitation and women's inferior status. Of course, there were brighter periods where women, priestesses or female warriors, broke out of their oppressive chains. But the essential features of her subjugation have survived and been consolidated, both in everyday activity and in intellectual and moral repression.

Her status overturned by private property, banished from her very self, relegated to the role of child raiser and servant, written out of history by philosophy (Aristotle, Pythagoras, and others) and the most entrenched religions, stripped of all worth by mythology, woman shared the lot of a slave, who in slave society was nothing more than a beast of burden with a human face.

So it is not surprising that in its phase of conquest the capitalist system, for which human beings are just so many numbers, should be the economic system that has exploited women the most brazenly and with the most sophistication. So, we are told, manufacturers in those days employed only women on their mechanized looms. They gave preference to women who were married and, among them, to those with a family at home to support. These women paid greater attention to their work than single women and were more docile, hav-

ing no choice but to work to the point of exhaustion to earn the barest subsistence for their families. So we can see how women's particular attributes are turned against her, and all the most moral and delicate qualities of her nature become the means by which she is subjugated. Her tenderness, her love for her family, the meticulous care she takes with her work — all this is used against her, even as she guards herself against any weaknesses she might have.

Thus, throughout the ages and throughout different types of society, women suffered a sorry fate, in a continually reinforced position of inferiority to men. Though her inequality was expressed in many and varied guises, she remained unequal.

In slave society, the male slave was looked upon as an animal, a means of production of goods and services. The woman, whatever her social rank, was crushed not only within her own class, but by other classes too. This was the case even for women who belonged to the exploiting classes. In feudal society, women were kept in a state of absolute dependence on men, justified with reference to women's supposed physical and psychological weakness. Often seen as a defiled object, a primary agent of indiscretion, women, with a few rare exceptions, were kept out of places of worship. In capitalist society, the woman, already morally and socially persecuted, is also subjugated economically. Kept by the man if she does not work, she is still a slave when she works herself to death. We will never be able to paint an adequate picture of the misery women suffer, nor show too strongly that women share the misery of proletarians as a whole.

The specific character of women's oppression

Woman's fate is bound up with that of the exploited male. This is a fact. However, this solidarity, arising from the exploitation that both men and women suffer and that binds them together historically, must not cause us to lose sight of the specific reality of the woman's situation. The conditions of her life are determined by more than economic factors, and they show that she is a victim of a specific oppression. The specific character of this oppression cannot be explained away by setting up an equal sign or by falling into easy and childish simplifications.

It is true that both she and the male worker are condemned to silence by their exploitation. But under the current economic system, the worker's wife is also condemned to silence by her worker-husband. In other words, in addition to the class exploitation common to both of them, women must confront a particular set of relations that

exist between them and men, relations of conflict and violence that use as their pretext physical differences. It is clear that the difference between the sexes is a feature of human society. This difference characterizes particular relations that immediately prevent us from viewing women, even in production, as simply female workers. The existence of relations of privilege, of relations that spell danger for the woman, all this means that women's reality constitutes an ongoing problem for us.

The male uses the complex nature of these relations as an excuse to sow confusion among women. He takes advantage of all the shrewdness that class exploitation has to offer in order to maintain his domination over women. This is the same method used by men to dominate other men in other lands. The idea was established that certain men, by virtue of their family origin and birth, or by divine right, were superior to others. This was the basis for the feudal system. Other men have managed to enslave whole peoples in this way. They used their origins, or arguments based on their skin color, as a supposedly scientific justification for dominating those who were unfortunate enough to have skin of a different color. This is what colonial domination and apartheid are based on.

We must pay the closest attention to women's situation because it pushes the most conscious of them into waging a sex war when what we need is a war of classes or parties, waged together, side by side. We have to say frankly that it is the attitude of men that makes such confusion possible. It is men's attitude that spawns the bold assertions made by feminism, certain of which have not been without value in the war which men and women are waging against oppression. This war is one we can and will win — if we understand that we need one another and are complementary, that we share the same fate, and in fact, that we are condemned to interdependence.

At this moment, we have little choice but to recognize that masculine behavior comprises vanity, irresponsibility, arrogance, and violence of all kinds toward women. This kind of behavior can hardly lead to coordinated action against women's oppression. And we must say frankly that such attitudes, which can sink to the level of sheer stupidity, are in reality nothing but a safety valve for the oppressed male, who, through brutalizing his wife, hopes to regain some of the human dignity denied him by the system of exploitation. This masculine foolishness is called sexism or machismo. It includes all kinds of moral and intellectual feebleness — even thinly veiled physical weakness — which often gives politically conscious women no choice but to consider it their duty to wage a war on two fronts.

In order to fight and win, women must identify with the oppressed layers and classes of society, such as workers and peasants, etc. The man, however, no matter how oppressed he is has another human being to oppress: his wife. To say this is, without any doubt, to affirm a terrible fact. When we talk about the vile system of apartheid, for example, our thoughts and emotions turn to the exploited and oppressed blacks. But we forget the black woman who has to endure her husband — this man who, armed with his passbook, allows himself all kinds of reprehensible detours before returning home to the woman who has waited for him so worthily, in such privation and destitution. We should keep in mind, too, the white woman of South Africa. Aristocratic, with every possible material comfort, she is, unfortunately, still a tool for the pleasure of the lecherous white man. The only thing these men can do to blot out the terrible crimes they commit against blacks is to engage in drunken brawls and perverse, bestial sexual behavior.

And there is no lack of examples of men, otherwise progressive, who live cheerfully in adultery, but who are prepared to murder their wives on the merest suspicion of infidelity. How many men in Burkina seek so-called consolation in the arms of prostitutes and mistresses of all kinds! And this is not to mention the irresponsible husbands whose wages go to keep mistresses or fill the coffers of bar owners.

And what should we think of those little men, also progressive, who get together in sleazy places to talk about the women they have taken advantage of. They think this is the way they will be able to measure up to other men and even humiliate some of them, by having seduced their wives. In reality, such men are pitiful and insignificant. They would not even enter our discussion, if it were not for the fact that their criminal behavior has been undermining the morale and virtue of many fine women whose contribution to our revolution could be of the utmost importance.

And then there are those more-or-less revolutionary militants — much less revolutionary than more — who do not accept that their wives should also be politically active; or who allow them to be active by day and by day only; or who beat their wives because they have gone out to meetings or to a demonstration at night.

Oh, these suspicious, jealous men! What narrow-mindedness! And what a limited, partial commitment! For is it only at night that a woman who is disenchanted and determined can deceive her husband? And what is this political commitment that expects her to stop political activity at nightfall and resume her rights and responsibilities only at daybreak. And, finally, what should we make of re-

marks about women made by all kinds of activists, the one more revolutionary than the next, remarks such as “women are despicably materialist,” “manipulators,” “clowns,” “liars,” “gossips,” “schemers,” “jealous,” and so on. Maybe this is all true of women. But surely it is equally true of men.

Could our society be any less perverse than this when it systematically burdens women down, keeps them away from anything that is supposed to be serious and of consequence, excludes them from anything other than the most petty and minor activities!

When you are condemned, as women are, to wait for your lord and master at home in order to feed him and receive his permission to speak or just to be alive, what else do you have to keep you occupied and to give you at least the illusion of being useful, but meaningful glances, gossip, chatter, furtive envious glances at others, and the bad-mouthing of their flirtations and private lives? The same attitudes are found among men put in the same situation.

Another thing we say about women, alas, is that they are always forgetful. We even call them birdbrains. But we must never forget that a woman’s whole life is dominated — tormented — by a fickle, unfaithful, and irresponsible husband and by her children and their problems. Completely worn out by attending to the entire family, how could she not have haggard eyes that reflect distraction and absentmindedness. For her, forgetting becomes an antidote to the suffering, a relief from the harshness of her existence, a vital self-defense mechanism.

But there are forgetful men, too — a lot of them. Some forget by indulging in drink or drugs, others through the various kinds of perversity they engage in throughout life. Does anyone ever say that these men are forgetful? What vanity! What banality! Banalities, though, that men revel in as a way of concealing the weaknesses of the masculine universe, because this masculine universe in an exploitative society needs female prostitutes. We say that both the female and the prostitute are scapegoats. We defile them and when we are done with them we sacrifice them on the altar of prosperity of a system of lies and plunder.

Prostitution is nothing but the microcosm of a society where exploitation is a general rule. It is a symbol of the contempt men have for women. And yet this woman is none other than the painful figure of the mother, sister, or wife of other men, thus of every one of us. In the final analysis, it is the unconscious contempt we have for ourselves. There can only be prostitutes as long as there are pimps and those who seek prostitutes.

But who frequents prostitutes? First, there are the husbands who commit their wives to chastity, while they relieve their depravity and debauchery upon the prostitute. This allows them to treat their wives with a seeming respect, while they reveal their true nature at the bosom of the lady of so-called pleasure. So on the moral plane prostitution becomes the counterpart to marriage. Tradition, customs, religion, and moral doctrines alike seem to have no difficulty adapting themselves to it. This is what our church fathers mean when they explain that “sewers are needed to assure the cleanliness of the palace.”

Then there are the unrepentant and intemperate pleasure seekers who are afraid to take on the responsibility of a home with its ups and downs, and who flee from the moral and material responsibility of fatherhood. So they discreetly seek out the address of a brothel, a gold mine of relations that entail no responsibility on their part.

There is also a whole bevy of men who, publicly at least and in “proper” company, subject women to public humiliation because of some grudge they have not had the strength of character to surmount, thus losing confidence in all women, who become from then on “tools of the devil.” Or else they do so out of hypocrisy, proclaiming their contempt for the female sex too often and categorically, a contempt that they strive to assume in the eyes of the public from which they have extorted admiration through false pretenses. All these men end up night after night in brothels until occasionally their hypocrisy is discovered.

Then there is the weakness of the man who is looking for a polyandrous arrangement. Far be it for us to make a value judgment on polyandry, which was the dominant form of relations between men and women in certain societies. What we are denouncing here are the courts of idle, moneygrubbing gigolos lavishly kept by rich ladies.

Within this same system, prostitution can, economically speaking, include both the prostitute and the “materialist-minded” married woman. The only difference between the woman who sells her body by prostitution and she who sells herself in marriage is the price and duration of the contract. So, by tolerating the existence of prostitution, we relegate all our women to the same rank: that of a prostitute or wife. The only difference between the two is that the legal wife, though still oppressed, at least has the benefit of the stamp of respectability that marriage confers. As for the prostitute, all that remains for her is the exchange value of her body, a value that fluctuates according to the fancy of the male chauvinist’s wallet.

Isn’t she just an object, which takes on more or less value accord-

ing to the degree to which her charms wilt? Isn't she governed by the law of supply and demand? Such a concentrated, tragic, and painful form of female slavery as a whole!

We should see in every prostitute an accusing finger pointing firmly at society as a whole. Every pimp, every partner in prostitution, turns the knife in this festering and gaping wound that disfigures the world of man and leads to his ruin. In fighting against prostitution, in holding out a saving hand to the prostitute, we are saving our mothers, our sisters, and our wives from this social leprosy. We are saving ourselves. We are saving the world.

Women's reality in Burkina Faso

If society sees the birth of a boy as a "gift from God," the birth of a girl is greeted as an act of fate, or at best, an offering that can serve in the production of food and the perpetuation of the human race.

The little male will be taught how to want and get, to demand and be served, to desire and take, to decide things without being questioned. The future woman, however, is dealt blow after blow by a society that, as one man — and "as one man" is the appropriate term — drums into her head norms that lead nowhere. A psychological straitjacket called virtue produces a spirit of personal alienation within her. A preoccupation with being protected is nurtured in the child's mind, inclining her to seek the supervision of a guardian or drawing her into marriage. What a monstrous mental fraud! This child knows no childhood. From the age of three, she must be true to her role in life: *to serve and be useful*.

While her brother of four or five will play till he drops from exhaustion or boredom, she, with little ceremony, will enter into production. She already has a trade: assistant housewife. It is an occupation without pay since, as is generally said, a housewife "does nothing." Do we not write "housewife" on the identity cards of women who have no income, signifying that they have no job, that they are "not working"? With the help of tradition and obligatory submissiveness, our sisters grow up more and more dependent, more and more dominated, more and more exploited, and with less and less free time for leisure.

While the young man's road is strewn with opportunities to develop himself and take charge of his life, at every new stage of the young girl's life, the social straitjacket is pulled tighter around her. She will pay a heavy price for having been born female. And she will pay it throughout her whole life, until the weight of her toil and the

effects of her physical and mental self-negation lead her to the day of eternal rest. She is an instrument of production at the side of her mother, who is already more of a matron than a mother. She never sits idle, is never left to her games and toys like her brother.

Whichever direction we turn — from the central plateau in the northeast, dominated by societies where power is highly centralized; to the west, where the powers of the village communities are decentralized; or to the southwest, the land of scattered collectives — the traditional form of social organization has at least one point in common: the subjugation of women. In our 8,000 villages, on our 600,000 plots of land, and in our million and more households, on the question of women we can see identical or similar approaches.

From one end of the country to the other, social cohesion as defined by man requires the subjugation of women and the subordination of the young. Our society, still too primitively agrarian, patriarchal, and polygamous by far, turns the woman into an object of exploitation for her labor power and of consumption for her reproductive capacity.

How do women manage to live out this peculiar dual identity, which makes them, at one and the same time, the vital knot that ties together the whole family by their presence and attention and guarantees its fundamental unity, and yet also makes them marginalized and ignored? The woman leads a twofold existence indeed, the depth of her social ostracism being equaled only by her own stoic endurance. In order to be able to live in harmony with the society of man, in order to obey his command, she envelopes herself in demeaning and self-effacing detachment. She sacrifices herself to this.

Woman, you are the source of life, yet an object; mother, yet domestic servant; nurturer, yet pseudowoman; you can do the bidding of both soil and hearth, yet you are invisible, faceless, and voiceless. You are the pivot, the unifier, yet a being in chains, shadow of the male shadow.

The woman is the pillar of family well-being, the midwife, washerwoman, cleaner, and cook. She is errand-runner, matron, farmer, healer, gardener, grinder, saleswoman, worker. She is labor power working with obsolete tools, putting in hundreds of thousands of hours for a hopeless level of production.

Every day our sisters, fighting as they are on the four fronts of our war against disease, hunger, poverty, and degeneracy, feel the pressure of changes over which they have no control. For every single one of the 800,000 males who emigrate from Burkina, a woman takes on an additional load. The two million Burkinabè men who live

outside the country thus exacerbate the sexual imbalance that puts women today at 51.7 percent of the total population or 52.1 percent of the potentially active population.

Too overburdened to give the necessary attention to her children, too exhausted to think of herself, the woman continues to slave away — the grinding wheel, wheel of fortune, drive wheel, spare wheel, the big wheel. Broken on the wheel and bullied, women, our sisters and wives, pay for creating life, for sustaining life. Socially they are relegated to third place, after the man and the child — just like the Third World, arbitrarily held back, the better to be dominated and exploited. Subjugated, the woman goes from a protective guardian who exploits her to one who dominates her and exploits her even more.

She is first to work and last to rest. She is first to fetch water and wood, first at the fire, yet last to quench her thirst. She may eat only if there is food left and then only after the man. She is the very keystone of the family, carrying both family and society on her shoulders, in her hands, and in her belly. In return, she is paid with oppressive, pro-population-growth ideology, food taboos, overwork, and malnutrition. Society rewards her with dangerous pregnancies, self-effacement, and innumerable other evils that make maternal deaths one of the most intolerable, unspeakable, and shameful defects of our society.

Predatory intruders come to this bedrock of alienation from afar and foment the isolation of women, making their condition even more precarious. The euphoria of independence left women with all hopes dashed. Segregated off during negotiations, absent from all decisions, vulnerable, and at the mercy of all, she has continued to be victim to family and society. Capital and bureaucracy have banded together to maintain her subjugation. Imperialism has done the rest.

With an education level only half that of men and little training in skilled trades; 99 percent illiterate; discriminated against on the job market; confined to secondary jobs; and the first to be harassed and fired, women, under the weight of a hundred traditions and a thousand excuses, never seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, continued to rise to challenge after challenge, because they had to keep going, whatever the cost, for the sake of their children, their family, and for society in general.

Capitalism needed cotton, shea nuts, and sesame for its industries. Women, our mothers, in addition to all the tasks they were already carrying out, found themselves responsible for harvesting these too.

In the towns, where civilization is supposedly a liberating force for

women, they have found themselves decorating bourgeois parlors, selling their bodies to survive, or serving as commercial bait for advertising. Women from the petty bourgeoisie no doubt live better on an economic level than women in the countryside. But are they really freer, more liberated, or more respected? Are they really entrusted with more responsibility? We must do more than ask questions in this regard. We must take a stand.

Many problems still persist, whether in the domain of jobs, access to education, women's status in legal codes, or even just at the level of everyday life: the Burkinabè woman still remains the one who follows the man, rather than going side by side.

The different neocolonial regimes that have been in power in Burkina have had no better than a bourgeois approach to women's emancipation, which brought only the illusion of freedom and dignity. It was bound to remain that way as long as only a few petty-bourgeois women from the towns were concerned with the latest fad in feminist politics — or rather primitive feminism — that demanded the right of the woman to be masculine. Thus the creation of the Ministry of Women, headed by a woman, was touted as a victory. Did we really understand the situation faced by women? Did we realize we were talking about the living conditions of 52 percent of the Burkinabè population? Did we understand that these conditions were the product of entire social, political, and economic infrastructures and pervasive backward conceptions, and that their transformation therefore could not rest with a single ministry, even if this were led by a woman? The answer is very clear. The women of Burkina were able to ascertain after several years of this ministry's existence that nothing had changed for them.

And it could not be otherwise, given that the approach to the question of women's liberation that led to the creation of this pseudoministry refused to recognize, show, and take into account the real cause of women's subjugation and exploitation. So we should not be surprised if, despite the existence of this ministry, prostitution grew, women's access to education and jobs did not improve, their civil and political rights were ignored, and the general conditions of their lives in town and countryside alike improved not one iota. Female trinket, sham female politician, female temptress, obedient female voter in elections, female robot in the kitchen, female frustrated by the passivity and restrictions imposed on her despite her open mind — wherever the female is placed in the spectrum of pain, whether she suffers the urban or the rural way, she continues to suffer!

But one single night placed women at the heart of the family's development and at the center of national solidarity. The dawn that followed the night of August 4, 1983, brought liberty with it, calling all of us to march together side by side in equality, as a single people joined by common goals. The August revolution found the Burkinabè woman in her state of subjugation, exploited by a neocolonial society deeply imbued with the ideology of backward social forces. She owed it to herself to break with these reactionary political views on women's emancipation, so widely praised and followed until then. She owed it to herself to draw up with utmost clarity a new, just, and revolutionary political approach to her liberation.

Women's emancipation and the Burkina revolution

On October 2, 1983, in the Political Orientation Speech, the National Council of the Revolution laid out clearly the main axis of the fight for women's liberation. It made a commitment to work to mobilize, organize, and unify all the active forces of the nation, particularly women.

The Political Orientation Speech had this to say specifically in regard to women: "Women will be an integral part of all the battles we will have to wage against the various shackles of neocolonial society and for the construction of a new society. They will take part in all levels of the organization of the life of the nation as a whole, from conceiving projects to making decisions and implementing them. The final goal of this great undertaking is to build a free and prosperous society in which women will be equal to men in all domains."

There can be no clearer way to conceptualize and explain the question of women and the liberation struggle ahead of us. "The genuine emancipation of women is that which entrusts responsibilities to them and involves them in productive activity and in the different struggles the people face. Women's genuine emancipation is one that exacts men's respect and consideration."

What is clearly indicated here, sister comrades, is that the struggle to liberate women is above all your struggle to deepen our democratic and popular revolution, a revolution that grants you from this moment on the right to speak and act in building a new society of justice and equality, in which men and women have the same rights and responsibilities. The democratic and popular revolution has created the conditions for such a liberating struggle. It now falls to you to act with the greatest sense of responsibility in breaking through all the shackles and obstacles that enslave women in backward societies like

ours and to assume your share of the responsibilities in the political fight to build a new society at the service of Africa and all humanity.

In the very first hours of the democratic and popular revolution we said that “emancipation, like freedom, is not granted but conquered. It is for women themselves to put forward their demands and mobilize to win them.” The revolution has not only laid out the objectives of the struggle for women’s liberation but has also indicated the road to be followed and the methods to be used, as well as the main actors in this battle. We have now been working together, men and women, for four years in order to achieve success and come closer to our final goal. We should note the battles waged and the victories won, as well as the setbacks suffered and the difficulties encountered. This will aid us in preparing and leading future struggles.

So what tasks does our democratic and popular revolution have in respect to women’s emancipation? What acquisitions do we have, and what obstacles still remain? One of the main acquisitions of the revolution with regard to women’s emancipation was, without any doubt, the establishment of the Women’s Union of Burkina (UFB). This is a major acquisition because it has provided the women of our country with a framework and a solid mechanism with which to wage a successful fight. Establishing the UFB represents a big victory in that it allows for the mobilization of all politically active women around well-defined and just objectives, under the leadership of the National Council of the Revolution.

The UFB is an organization of militant and serious women who are determined to change things, to fight until they win, to fall and fall again, but to get back on their feet and go forward without retreating. This is the new consciousness that has taken root among the women of Burkina, and we should all be proud of it. Comrades, the Women’s Union of Burkina is your combat weapon. It belongs to you. Sharpen it again and again so that its blade will cut more deeply, bringing you ever-greater victories.

The different initiatives directed at women’s emancipation that the government has taken over a period of a little more than three years are certainly inadequate. But they have put us on the right road, to the point where our country can present itself as being in the vanguard of the battle to liberate women. Women of Burkina participate more and more in decision making and in the real exercise of popular power. They are present everywhere the country is being built. You can find them at every work site: in the Sourou [Valley irrigation project], in our reforestation programs, in vaccination brigades, in Operation Clean Town, in the Battle for the Railroad, and so on.

Step by step, the women of Burkina have gained a foothold everywhere, are asserting themselves and demolishing all the male chauvinist, backward conceptions of men. And this process will go on until women are present in Burkina's entire social and professional fabric. For three and a half years our revolution has worked to systematically eliminate all practices that demean women, such as prostitution and related activity, like vagrancy and female juvenile delinquency, forced marriages, female circumcision,¹ and their particularly difficult living conditions.

By working to solve the water problem, by building windmills in the villages, by assuring the widespread use of the improved stove, by building public nurseries, carrying out daily vaccinations, and encouraging healthy, abundant, and varied eating habits, the revolution has no doubt greatly contributed to improving the quality of women's lives. Women, for their part, must commit themselves to greater involvement in the fight against imperialism. They should be firm in producing and consuming Burkinabè goods, and, as producers and consumers of locally produced goods, always strive to be a major factor in our economy.

Though the August revolution has already done much for the emancipation of women, this is still far from adequate. Much remains to be done. And in order to continue our work and do it even better, we must be more aware of the difficulties still to be overcome. They are many. At the very top of the list are the problems of illiteracy and low political consciousness. Both of these problems are intensified by the inordinate influence reactionary social forces exert in backward societies like ours. We must work with perseverance to overcome these two main obstacles. As long as women do not have a clear appreciation of the just nature of the political battle to be fought and do not see clearly how to take it forward, we can easily run around in circles and eventually slip backwards.

This is why the UFB must fully assume its responsibilities. Its members must strive to overcome their own weaknesses and break with the kind of practices and behavior traditionally thought of as female — behavior we unfortunately often still see today. I am talking here about all those petty meannesses, like jealousy, exhibitionism, continual empty, negative, and unprincipled criticism, mutual defamation, supersensitive subjectivity, and rivalries. Revolutionary women must overcome this kind of behavior, which is particularly acute on the part of petty-bourgeois women. It jeopardizes all collective effort, while the fight for women's liberation is one that must be organized, thus entailing the combined

contribution of all women.

We must collectively remain alert to women's access to productive work. It is this work that emancipates and liberates women by assuring them economic independence and a greater social role, as well as a more complete and accurate understanding of the world.

Our view of the economic power women need has nothing in common with the crude greed and crass materialism of certain women who are literally like stock market speculators or walking safes. These women lose all their dignity and self-control, not to mention their principles, as soon as they hear the clinking of jewelry or the snapping of bank notes. Some of them unfortunately push their husbands deep into debt, even to embezzlement and corruption. They are like dangerous, sticky, fetid mud stifling the revolutionary fervor of their husbands or companions. We find such sad cases where the man's revolutionary flame has burned out, and where the husband's commitment to the cause of the people has been abandoned for the sake of a selfish, jealous, and envious shrew.

The education and economic emancipation of women, if not well understood and channeled in a constructive direction, can be a source of misfortune for the woman and thus for society as a whole. The educated and economically independent woman is sought after as lover and wife in the good times and abandoned as soon as bad times arrive. Society passes a merciless judgment on them. An educated woman "has trouble finding a husband," it is said. The woman with independent means is suspect. They are all condemned to remain single — which would not be a problem if being single were not the cause for general ostracism from society — innocent victims who do not understand their crime or their defect, frustrated because every day is like a depressant pushing them to become cantankerous and hypochondriacs. For many women great knowledge has been the cause of heartbreak, and great fortune has spawned many a misfortune.

The solution to this apparent paradox lies in the ability of these unfortunate rich and educated women to place their great wealth and knowledge at the service of the people. By doing this, they will be all the more appreciated and admired by the many people to whom they have been able to bring a little happiness. How could such women possibly feel alone in these conditions? How could they not know emotional fulfillment when they have taken their love of themselves and turned it into love of others?

Our women must not pull back in the face of the many different aspects of their struggle, which leads them to courageously and

proudly take full charge of their own lives and discover the happiness of being themselves, not the domesticated female of the male. Today, many women still seek the protective cover of a man as the safest way out from all that oppresses them. They marry without love or joy, just to serve some boor, some dreary male who is far removed from real life and cut off from the struggles of the people.

Often, women will simultaneously demand some haughty independence and at the same time protection, or even worse, to be put under the colonial protectorate of a male. They do not believe that they can live otherwise. No. We must say again to our sisters that marriage, if it brings society nothing positive and does not bring them happiness, is not indispensable and should even be avoided.

Let us show them our many examples of hardy and fearless pioneers, single women with or without children, who are radiant and blossoming, overflowing with richness and availability for others — even envied by unhappily married women, because of the warmth they generate and the happiness they draw from their freedom, dignity, and willingness to help others.

Women have shown sufficient proof of their ability to manage the home and raise children — in short, to be responsible members of society — without the oppressive tutelage of a man. Our society is surely sufficiently advanced to put an end to this banishment of the single woman. Comrade revolutionaries, we should see to it that marriage is a choice that adds something positive, and not some kind of lottery where we know what the ticket costs us, but have no idea what we will end up winning. Human feelings are too noble to be subject to such games.

Another sure source of the problem is the feudal, reactionary, and passive attitude of many men who by their behavior continue to hold things back. They have absolutely no intention of jeopardizing the total control they have over women, either at home or in society in general. In the struggle to build a new society, which is a revolutionary struggle, these men place themselves on the side of reaction and counterrevolution by their conduct. For the revolution cannot triumph without the genuine emancipation of women.

So, comrades, we must be highly conscious of all these difficulties in order to better face future battles. The woman, like the man, has qualities and weaknesses — which undoubtedly proves that she is equal to man. Placing the emphasis deliberately on woman's qualities in no way means we have an idealistic vision of her. We simply aim to single out her qualities and capacities that men and society have al-

ways hidden in order to justify her exploitation and subjugation.

How should we organize ourselves to accelerate the march forward to emancipation?

Though our resources are ridiculously small, our goals are ambitious. The will to go forward, our firm conviction, is not sufficient to win. We must marshal our forces, organize them, and channel them all toward winning our struggle.

Emancipation has been a topic of discussion in our country for more than two decades now. It has been an emotional discussion. Today, we must approach the question in its overall context. We must not shirk our responsibility by failing to bring all possible forces into the struggle and leaving this pivotal question of women's emancipation off to the side. We must likewise avoid rushing out ahead, leaving far behind those, especially the women, who should be on the front lines.

At the governmental level, guided by the directives of the National Council of the Revolution, a consistent plan of action to benefit women will be implemented involving all the different ministerial departments and assigning the short- and medium-term responsibility of each. This plan of action, far from being a list of pious wishes and other feelings of pity, should be a guide to stepping up revolutionary action, since it is in the heat of struggle that important and decisive victories are won. This plan of action should be conceived by ourselves, for ourselves. Our wide-ranging, democratic discussions should produce bold resolutions that build our confidence in women. What do men and women want for women? This is what we will include in our plan of action. This plan, by involving all the ministerial departments, will be a sharp break from the approach of treating the question of women's equality as a side issue, relieving of responsibility those who, through their daily activity, should have and could have made a significant contribution to solving this problem.

This many-sided approach to women's emancipation flows directly from our scientific analysis of the origins and source of their oppression and the importance of this struggle to the building of a new society free from all forms of exploitation and oppression. We are not pleading for anyone to condescendingly do women a favor. We are demanding, in the name of the revolution — whose purpose is to give, not to take — that justice be done to women.

From now on, every ministry and the administrative committee of each ministry, in addition to the usual overall assessment we make,

will be judged according to their success in implementing this plan. So our statistical analyses will necessarily include action taken of direct benefit or concern to women.

The question of women's equality must be uppermost in the mind of all those making decisions, at all times, and in all the different phases of conceiving and executing plans for development. Conceiving a development project without women's participation is like using only four fingers when we have ten. It is an invitation to failure.

On the level of ministries charged with education, we must be doubly alert to women's access to education. Education constitutes a qualitative step toward emancipation. It is an obvious fact that wherever women have had access to education, their march to equality has been accelerated. Emerging from the darkness of ignorance allows women to transmit and use the tools of knowledge in order to place themselves at the disposal of society. All those different ridiculous and backward concepts that hold that only education for males is important and profitable, and that educating women is an extravagance, must be wiped out in Burkina Faso.

Parents must accord the same attention to the progress of their daughters at school as they do to their sons, their pride and joy. Girls have proven that they are the equals of boys at school, if not simply better. But above all they have the right to education in order to learn and know, to be free. In future literacy campaigns, the rate of participation by women must be raised to correspond with their numerical weight in the population. It would be too great an injustice to maintain such an important part of the population — half, in fact — in ignorance.

On the level of the ministries of labor and justice, texts should constantly be kept in line with the transformation our society has been going through since August 4, 1983, so that equality between men and women can be a tangible reality. The new labor code, now being debated and prepared, should express how profoundly our people aspire to social justice. It should mark an important stage in the work of destroying the neocolonial state apparatus, a class apparatus fashioned by reactionary regimes in order to perpetuate the system that oppressed the masses, especially women.

How could we continue to accept that a woman doing the same work as a man should earn less? Can we continue to accept dowries and forcing widows to marry their brothers-in-law, which reduce our sisters and mothers to common commodities to be bartered for? There are so many medieval laws still imposed on our people, particularly women, that it is only just that, finally, justice be done.

In the ministries in charge of culture and family affairs, particular emphasis will be put on developing a new mentality in social relations. This will be done in close collaboration with the Women's Union of Burkina. In the framework of our revolution, our mothers and wives have important and particular contributions to make to the revolutionary transformation of society. The education of our children, efficient management of the family budget, family planning, the forging of a family spirit, patriotism — these are all important attributes that should effectively contribute to the birth of a revolutionary morale and an anti-imperialist life-style, all preludes to a new society.

In the home, women should take particular care to participate fully in improving the quality of life. As Burkinabè, living well means eating well and wearing clothes made in Burkina. It means keeping a clean and pleasant home, because this in itself has an important impact on relations within the family. Living in squalor produces squalid relations. Look at pigs if you don't believe me.

And the transformation of our mentality would be incomplete if the new woman is stuck living with a man of the old kind. Where is men's superiority complex more pernicious, yet more crucial, than in the home where the mother, a guilty accomplice, teaches her offspring sexist and unequal rules? Such women perpetuate sexual complexes right from the beginning of a child's education and the formation of its character.

In addition, what use are our efforts to draw someone into political activity during the day if this newly involved comrade finds himself with a reactionary and demobilizing woman at night!

And what about housework, this all-consuming, brutalizing work that has a tendency to turn you into robots and leave no time or energy to think! This is why we need resolute action directed toward men and at implementing a large-scale network of social services such as nurseries, day-care centers, and cafeterias. This would allow women to more easily take part in revolutionary debate and action. Each child, whether rejected as the mother's failure or doted on as the father's pride, should be of concern to society as a whole, every one the object of society's attention and affection. Men and women will, from now on, share all the tasks in the home.

The plan of action to benefit women should be a revolutionary tool aimed at the general mobilization of all our political and administrative structures for women's emancipation. Comrades, I repeat, before it can correspond to the real needs of women, this plan must be subjected to a democratic discussion at every level

of the UFB's structures.

The UFB is a revolutionary organization. As such, it is a school for popular democracy, governed by the organizational principles of criticism and self-criticism and democratic centralism. It should dissociate itself from those organizations where mystification has won out over concrete objectives. Such a demarcation can only be a permanent and effective acquisition if the comrades of the UFB carry out a resolute struggle against the weaknesses that unfortunately still persist in some female milieus. We are not talking here about rallying women for appearance' sake or for any other electoralist, demagogic, or otherwise reprehensible ulterior motive. We are talking about assembling women fighters to win victories.

We must fight in an orderly way and around a program of action decided democratically within the different committees, taking fully into account each revolutionary structure's framework of organizational autonomy. Every leader of the Women's Union of Burkina must be completely absorbed in the responsibilities she has in her particular structure in order to be effective in action. The UFB needs to carry out vast political and ideological educational campaigns among its leaders in order to strengthen its organization and structures on all levels.

Comrades, members of the UFB, your union, our union, must participate fully in the class struggle on the side of the masses. Those millions whose consciousness was dormant and who have now been awakened by the advent of the revolution represent a formidable force. On August 4, 1983, we Burkinabè made a decision to rely on our own resources, which means in large part on the resources that you, the women of Burkina, represent. In order to be useful, your energies have to be focused as one on the struggle to eliminate imperialism's economic domination and every breed of exploiters. As a tool for mobilization, the UFB will have to work to forge a highly developed political awareness on the part of its members, so that they can throw themselves totally into accomplishing the different actions the government undertakes to improve the situation of women.

Comrades, only the revolutionary transformation of our society can create the conditions for your liberation. You are dominated by both imperialism and by men. In every male languishes the soul of a feudal lord, a male chauvinist, which must be destroyed. This is why you must eagerly embrace the most advanced revolutionary slogans to make your liberation real and to advance toward it more rapidly. This is why the National Council of the Revolution notes with great joy how intensely you are participating in the big national develop-

ment projects and encourages you to give greater and greater support to the August revolution, which is above all your revolution.

By participating massively in these projects you are showing yourselves to be even more worthy, given that in its division of tasks, society has always sought to relegate you to the least important tasks. We can see now that your apparent physical weakness is nothing more than the result of norms of appearance and fashion that society has imposed on you because you are female.

As we go forward, our revolution must break from all those feudal conceptions that lead us to ostracize the unmarried woman without realizing that this is merely another form of appropriation, that decrees each woman the property of a man. This is why young mothers are looked down upon as if they were the only ones responsible for their situation, whereas there is always a guilty man involved. This is how childless women can come to be oppressed by antiquated beliefs, when there is a scientific explanation for their infertility, which science can correct.

In addition, society has imposed on women norms of beauty that violate the integrity of their bodies, such as female circumcision, scarring, the filing of teeth, and the piercing of lips and noses. Practicing these norms is of dubious value. In the case of female circumcision, it can even endanger a woman's ability to have children and affect her emotional life. Other types of bodily mutilation, though less dangerous, like the piercing of ears and tatoos, are no less an expression of women's conditioning, imposed by society if a woman wants to find a husband. Sisters, you make a great effort to win a husband. You pierce your ears and do violence to your body to be acceptable to men. You hurt yourselves so that the man can hurt you even more!

Women, my comrades-in-arms, I am addressing myself to you, you who lead miserable lives in town and village alike. In the countryside, you sag under the weight of the various burdens of dreadful exploitation that is "justified" and "explained away." In the towns, you are supposedly happy, yet deep down you are miserable from one day to the next, laden down with tasks.

In the early morning, the woman turns round and round in front of her wardrobe like a spinning top, wondering what to wear — not so as to be dressed and protect herself against the weather, but in order to please men. Every day she is supposed to — obliged to — please men. You women, when it is time to rest, you have the sad look of one who has no right to rest. You are obliged to ration yourself, be chaste, and diet in order to maintain a figure that men will desire. At

night, before going to bed, you cover yourselves with makeup, with those numerous products that you detest so much — we know you do — but that might hide an indiscreet wrinkle, an unfortunate sign of age always considered to have come too soon, age that has started to show, or a premature plumpness. There you are — obliged to go through a two-hour ritual every night to preserve your best attributes, only to be ill-rewarded by an inattentive husband. Then you start all over again at dawn.

Comrades, yesterday in speeches given by the Directorate for Mobilization and Organization of Women, and in accordance with the statutes of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the National Secretariat of the CDRs successfully undertook to set up committees, subcommittees, and sections of the UFB. The Political Commission, which is in charge of organization and planning, will be responsible for completing the organizational pyramid of the UFB by setting up a national bureau of the organization.

We don't need another apparatus led by women to bureaucratically control women's lives, nor to have the occasional underhanded talk among functionaries about women's lives. What we need are women who will fight because they know that without a fight the old order will not be destroyed and no new order can be built. We are not looking to organize the status quo but to definitively destroy and replace it. The National Bureau of the UFB should be made up of convinced and determined cadres who will always be available as long as our great task lies ahead. And the fight begins at home. These cadres should be conscious of the fact that in the eyes of the masses, they represent the image of the emancipated, revolutionary woman and should conduct themselves accordingly.

Comrades, sisters and brothers, experience shows us more and more that in changing the classical order of things only the organized people are capable of wielding power democratically. Justice and equality are the basic principles that allow women to show that societies are wrong not to have confidence in them on the political and economic level. The woman, wielding the power she has gained among the people, is in a position to rehabilitate all women condemned by history. In undertaking to profoundly and qualitatively transform our society, the changes wrought by our revolution must include the aspirations of the Burkinabè woman.

Comrades, the future demands that women be freed, and the future, everywhere, brings revolutions. If we lose the fight to liberate women we will have lost all right to hope for a positive transformation of our society into something superior. Our revolution will then

have no meaning. It is to wage this noble struggle that all of us, men and women, are summoned.

Let our women move up to the front ranks! Our final victory depends essentially on their capacities, their wisdom in struggle, their determination to win. Let each woman be able to train a man to reach the height of his fullness. To be able to do so, let each woman draw from her immense well of affection and love, let her find the strength and the know-how to encourage us when we are advancing and to replenish our energy when we flag. Let each woman advise a man and be a mother to all men, you who brought us into the world, who educated and made men of us. Let each woman continue to play the role of mother and guide, you who have guided us to where we are today. Let the woman remember what she is capable of, that she is the center of the earth; let each one remember that she lives in the world, for the world; let her remember that the first to cry for a man is a woman. Likewise it is said, and you will remember this comrades, that at the moment of death each man calls out with his last breath the name of a woman — the name of his mother, his sister, or his companion.

Women need men in order to win, just as men need women's victories in order to win. At the side of every man, comrades, there is always a woman. This woman's hand that rocks the man's child will rock the entire world. Our mothers give us life. Our wives give birth to our children, feed them at their breasts, raise them, and make them into responsible beings. Women assure the continuity of our people, the coming into being of humanity; women ensure that our life's work will go forward; women sustain the pride of every man.

Mothers, sisters, companions, there can be no proud man without a woman at his side. Every proud and strong man draws his energy from a woman. The endless source of virility is the power of the female. The key to victory always lies in the hands of a woman. It is by the side of a woman, sister, or companion, that our honor and dignity will flood back to us.

We all return to a woman to find consolation and the courage and inspiration to set out anew for the battle, to receive the advice that will temper our recklessness or some presumptuous irresponsibility. It is always at the side of a woman that we become men again, and every man is a child for every woman.

He who does not love women, who does not respect women, who does not honor women, despised his own mother. Thus, he who despises women destroys the very place from which he is born. He kills himself because he believes he has no right to exist, having come

from the generous womb of a woman. Comrades, woe to he who despises women! Woe to all men, here and elsewhere, to all men of all social ranks, wherever they may come from, who despise women, who do not understand, or who forget what the woman represents: "You have touched the women, you have struck a rock. You have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed."²

Comrades, no revolution, beginning with our own, can triumph without first liberating women. Our struggle, our revolution will be incomplete as long as we understand liberation to mean essentially that of men. After the liberation of the proletariat, the liberation of women still remains to be won.

Comrades, every woman is the mother of a man. I would not presume, as a man and a son, to give advice to a woman or to indicate which road she should take. This would be like giving advice to one's mother. But I know, too, that out of indulgence and affection, a mother listens to her son, despite his whims, his dreams, and his vanity. And this is what consoles me and makes it possible for me to address you here. This is why, comrades, we need you in order to achieve the genuine liberation of all of us. I know that you will always find the strength and the time to help us save our society.

Comrades, there is no true social revolution without the liberation of women. May my eyes never see and my feet never take me to a society where half the people are held in silence. I hear the roar of women's silence. I sense the rumble of their storm and feel the fury of their revolt. I await and hope for the fertile eruption of the revolution through which they will transmit the power and the rigorous justice issued from their oppressed wombs.

Comrades, forward to conquer the future!

The future is revolutionary!

The future belongs to those who fight!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Notes

1. Female circumcision, or clitoridectomy, is a tribal custom entailing the removal of the clitoris of young girls, especially before puberty. It causes many serious injuries and sometimes death. Declared illegal before the revolution, it is still practiced in some of the most isolated rural areas.

2. These words are from a song made famous on August 9, 1956, when twenty thousand South African women, led by the African National Congress, protested against the pass laws of apartheid. August 9 is celebrated today as South African Women's Day.

We Can Count on Cuba

August 1987

The following interview by Claudio Hackin, a special correspondent for Radio Havana Cuba, is translated from the August 4, 1987, issue of Granma, the daily newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Claudio Hackin: Comrade Thomas Sankara, you have met several times with President Fidel Castro. Would you please tell us about your first meeting with him, which took place in New Delhi in March 1983 at the Seventh Summit Conference of Nonaligned Countries — before you became leader of the revolution in Burkina Faso.

Thomas Sankara: For me this was and remains a memorable meeting. As I recall he was very much in demand. There were a great number of people around him, and I thought it would be impossible to talk with him since he didn't know me. I did, however, get the chance to meet with Fidel.

In this first conversation, I realized Fidel had great human feelings, keen intuition, and that he understood the importance of our struggle and the problems of my country. I remember all this as though it were yesterday. And I have recalled it with pleasure each time I met with him again. We are great friends, thanks to the revolutionary process that guides both Burkina Faso and Cuba.

Hackin: After August 4, 1983, new relations opened between Cuba and Burkina Faso. How do you view the development of these collaborative ties?

Sankara: Cooperation between Cuba and Burkina Faso has reached a very high level. We attach great importance to this because it puts us in contact with a sister revolution. We like to feel we are among friends; nobody likes to feel alone. The knowledge that we can count on Cuba is an important source of strength for us.

A number of programs of economic cooperation have been estab-

lished, such as in the sugarcane sector, in which Cuba is a specialist, and ceramics. In addition, Cuban specialists have carried out studies in areas such as the production of railroad ties and the prefabrication of units for use in housing construction. The same is true in the social sector, in health and education. Many Cubans are helping in the training of technical cadres here. And we also have many students in Cuba. So Cuba is very close to us.

Hackin: Do you believe it is necessary to build a vanguard party in Burkina Faso?

Sankara: We have to build a vanguard party. We have to create a structure based on organization, because our achievements will remain fragile unless we also have the means to defend them, the means to educate the masses so as to score new victories. We don't see the formation of a party as a distant or impossible goal. We're actually quite close to this objective. But given that a number of small-group concepts still remain, we will have to wage a serious drive for agreement, regroupment, and unity. The nature of the party, its concept, and the process of building it will certainly not be the same as it would have been had we built a party before coming to power. We will have to take numerous precautions in order to avoid falling into leftist opportunism. We can't let the masses down. We have to be very careful, selective, and demanding.

Hackin: You have referred to the class struggle in your country in various speeches. What are the factors of this struggle today?

Sankara: In our country the question of the class struggle is posed differently from the way it's posed in Europe. We have a working class that is numerically weak and insufficiently organized. And we have no strong national bourgeoisie that could have given rise to an antagonistic working class. So what we have to retain is the very essence of the class struggle, whose expression in Burkina Faso is the struggle against imperialism, supported by its internal allies.

Hackin: What social groups oppose the revolution?

Sankara: Feudal-type forces that can't applaud the disappearance of their privileges. We also have a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which is still here, hiding. It is experienced in administrative work in the state apparatus. It's located at various places in state management and never ceases to harass us and create difficulties for us, with imperialism's backing. In addition, there are the big landowners, who are not very numerous, as well as some sectors of the religious

hierarchy who more or less openly oppose the revolution.

Hackin: What is democracy, in your opinion?

Sankara: Democracy is the people, with all their strength and potential. Ballot boxes and an electoral apparatus in and of themselves don't signify the existence of democracy. Those who organize elections every so often and are concerned about the people only when an election is coming up don't have a genuinely democratic system. But wherever people can say what they think at any time, there is genuine democracy — because the confidence of the people must be earned every day. Democracy can't be conceived of without total power resting in the hands of the people — economic, military, political, social, and cultural power.

Hackin: How did you become a Marxist?

Sankara: It was very simple — through discussion, through friendship with a few men, also as a result of my social experience. I listened to these men discuss and put forward clear and logical solutions to society's problems. Gradually, thanks to reading, but above all to discussions with Marxists on the reality of our country, I arrived at Marxism.

Hackin: There's a street in Ouagadougou named after Ernesto Che Guevara. What meaning does this noteworthy Latin American patriot have for you?

Sankara: This was a man who gave himself totally to the revolution; his eternal youth is an example. For me the most important thing is to achieve the victory to be found deep inside each one of us. I admire Che Guevara for having done this in an exemplary way.

Hackin: In the context of Africa, what does Patrice Lumumba mean to you?

Sankara: Patrice Lumumba is a symbol, and when I see African reactionaries who were contemporaries of this hero and who were unable to evolve even a little despite contact with him, I consider them miserable wretches. They stood before a work of art and were unable to appreciate it.

Lumumba confronted an extremely unfavorable situation. He grew up under conditions in which Africans had practically no rights whatsoever. Largely self-educated, Patrice Lumumba was one of the few who learned more or less how to read and managed to become conscious of the situation of their people and of Africa. When you

read the last letter Lumumba wrote to his wife, you ask yourself, how could this man have come to an understanding of so many truths other than by experiencing them inwardly and wholeheartedly? It makes me extremely sad to see how some people use his image and name. There should be a court to judge those who dare use the name of Patrice Lumumba to serve the base and vile causes they promote.

Hackin: Comrade President, if you could step back four years, would you do the same thing, follow the same road?

Sankara: I'd take a different road in order to do much more than I've accomplished, because in my opinion it hasn't been sufficient. Many mistakes have held up the process, when progress could have been more complete and rapid. So if we had everything to do over again, with the experience we have today, we would correct many things. But we would never abandon the revolution. We would make it deeper, stronger, and more beautiful.

Revolution Is a Perpetual Teacher

August 4, 1987

Sankara gave this speech in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, on August 4, 1987, at the fourth anniversary celebration of the revolution. It is translated from Carrefour africain, August 21, 1987.

Honorable guests from the Soviet Union, Togo, Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, Ethiopia, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, Libya, Algeria, Iran, Cuba, France, Italy; Dear friends of Burkina Faso who have come from Senegal, Belgium, and Spain;

Comrades of the democratic and popular revolution:

Today, August 4, 1987, we are celebrating the fourth anniversary of our revolution, the August revolution, the democratic and popular revolution. In order to reach this joyful and exhilarating gathering, we let our hearts guide our way, and our hearts led us to Bobo Dioulasso, this historic and exuberant town whose name is so totally linked to the Africa of anticolonial struggle, the Africa of unity, of federation, in short, the Africa of invigorating pan-Africanism.

I wish to thank all who came here today: all those who have become Burkinabè for the day and those who are Burkinabè forever. I wish to thank all those who could not make the trip to Bobo Dioulasso, but who are certainly with us in spirit — with us humbly and unobtrusively by choice or by necessity, with solemnity and dignity.

Thanks also to all those who were unable to celebrate with us today, due to illness and other various hardships, and who stoically cherish the hope of better days. And to those who are no longer with us, but who had every right to savor the pleasure of our victories — in the memory of all those militants who have prematurely left us, let us observe a minute's silence.

Thank you.

Comrades, the fourth anniversary of our revolution takes place under the banner of our dynamic peasantry, the community of those

who solve in practice the concrete question of food every day and for every one of us. Yes, it is this peasantry, emerging from the shadows of the Middle Ages and backwardness, that one way or another must win this gamble every year under the most precarious conditions. This peasantry, our peasantry, makes up the largest part of our population. It is this part that has been subjected to — and continues to be subjected to — the most intense exploitation at the hands of the remnants of feudal-type forces and of imperialism. It is this part that has suffered the most from the ills we have inherited from colonial society: illiteracy, obscurantism, pauperization, various forms of harassment, endemic diseases, famine, and so on.

So it comes as no surprise that our peasantry today is a force that wants change, revolutionary change, because only the revolution, by overturning the old order, can satisfy its legitimate aspirations. In order to respond to this legitimate desire and mobilize all available energy, the democratic and popular revolution has transformed this peasantry into an organized political force by creating the National Union of Peasants of Burkina.

This political force must have as its axis the strengthening of the revolutionary process by forging a conscious commitment to the revolution on the part of each and every poor peasant. In the course of the past year many fine initiatives have been taken in this direction. But the task is a big and complex one, and we will undoubtedly be required to come back and define our goals more fully and profoundly during this fifth year of the revolution.

This fourth anniversary celebration, focused on the peasantry, should mark the birth of a new kind of peasant in harmony with the new society that is being built. We are not celebrating the backward peasant, who is resigned to his fate, naive, a slave to obscurantism, and ferociously conservative. We are celebrating the birth of the new peasant, who is serious and aware of his responsibilities, a man who is working for the future by arming himself with new technology. The more and more widespread application of the slogan “Produce and consume Burkinabè” is already helping to create this new image of the peasant, the great actor in and beneficiary of our policy of building an independent national economy, as laid out by the Second National Conference of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

In addition, implementing the first five-year plan of public development, which is part of this new economic policy, should be the occasion for all of us to learn how to meet our own needs and constantly improve the quality of our work. The plan should thus not be carried out with the sole concern of making it possible

someday to compile statistics.

Thanks to this all-embracing transformation and its consequences, the term *peasant* should cease to be the derogatory term we know today and become a synonym for respect — the respect we owe to a proud and worthy combatant who defends just causes and who successfully and adequately shoulders his part in social production as a member of this great body that is the people. The peasantry should not be left to fight this battle alone. The working class and the revolutionary petty-bourgeois intellectuals should take up their historic responsibility and, through sacrifices and self-denial, work to reduce the gap between town and country. The working class and the revolutionary petty-bourgeois intellectuals should thus consider this celebration as an important milestone in the process of strengthening their strategic alliance with the peasantry. Today is the festival of the peasantry and therefore of its allies too — allies symbolized by our emblem, the emblem of the democratic and popular revolution.

Comrades, today we must take a look at the four years our revolution has existed, not to mechanically laud our success — though a legitimate pride urges us to do so — but to better draw the lessons and clarify the road to further progress. We have undertaken and completed many concrete transformations that have benefited the masses. These results have not come because our equipment is more plentiful or exceptional in quality. They are due to the actions of men — men who yesterday were resigned to fate, mute, and passive. Today these same men are on their feet and engaged in a concrete revolutionary struggle in different workplaces. The victories we are registering are the fruit of their labor, the projection in real life of their creative genius and their revolutionary enthusiasm. These results are proof that our revolution is a genuine people's revolution, because it draws on the strength, the richness, and the invincibility of the masses.

This is why we should salute so much courage, self-sacrifice, and devotion on the part of the rank and file of the democratic and popular revolution. We do not salute them out of self-satisfaction. The results we have achieved can be explained scientifically. Power, whether it comes from muscles or is produced by machines, can be measured and compared and therefore is interchangeable. Others before us have demonstrated this — we had only to apply it to our reality. Doing so has required that our mentality here in Burkina cease to be a mere reproduction of the cultural alienation and political servitude shaped by imperialism to perpetuate its domination of our newly independent countries.

This transformation of our mentality is far from complete. There are still many among us who take foreign norms as their point of reference in judging the quality of their social, economic, and cultural lives. They live in Burkina Faso yet refuse to accept the concrete reality of our country.

For the new society, we must have a new people, a people that has its own identity, knows what it wants and how to assert itself, and understands what will be necessary to reach the goals it has set for itself. Our people, after four years of revolution, are the embryo of this new people. The unprecedented decline of passive resignation among our people is a tangible sign of this. The Burkinabè people as a whole believe that a better future is possible. On this level, we have even managed to convince reactionaries of yesterday — people who today, caught up in the gears of history's forward march, join us in looking to the future with optimism, forgetting that only yesterday they were preaching submission to imperialism and perpetual begging as a way to develop the country.

The construction of our homeland has strengthened our collective consciousness of the need to depend on our own forces and to energetically reject all servile mimicking and humiliating and degenerate groveling.

Comrades, the political year that has just ended, culminating in this fourth anniversary, has certainly been full of action. While not going back over the details of the contradictions that have appeared, or on the quality of the solutions we have found, we must assimilate the main lesson of this experience. The democratic and popular revolution needs a convinced people, not a conquered people — a people that is truly convinced, not submissive and passively enduring its destiny.

Since August 4, 1983, revolutionary Burkina Faso has burst onto the African and international scene especially and above all due to the intellectual genius and moral and human virtue of its leaders and of its organized masses. We have overcome adversity and triumphed over determined and vile opponents who were armed to the teeth. We have known how to be firm in the defense of our principles without ever giving in to rage. We have defended ourselves without hatred and with respect for the dignity of others, because dignity is sacred in Burkina.

What we need to do here above all is to note the diverse forms hostile forces can take and — since tomorrow's battles will undoubtedly be harder and more complex — draw the lessons that will make us stronger. During the past four years of the revolution we have had to

constantly confront reaction and imperialism. They have hatched the most sordid plots aimed at sabotaging our work — or worse, overthrowing our revolution. Imperialism and reaction are and will remain fiercely opposed to the transformations that are taking place every day in our country and that threaten their interests.

Throughout four years of revolution our people have been proving that it is possible to eliminate exploitation, to do away with misery, and to create happiness for all with the power of our own hands and hearts. Those living in luxury from the exploitation of others have been opposed to our struggle and will be even more so tomorrow. What have they not done, what are they not prepared to do even today, to stop our forward march? Economic sabotage, smear campaigns, corruption, provocations of all sorts, blackmail, and threats — these are the kinds of enemy maneuvers we have had to identify and confront during these four years of revolutionary struggle.

We have also seen adversity within our beloved Burkina, within our own ranks, in the camp of the revolution. Erroneous practices and ideas harmful to the revolution have, in fact, developed within the masses and among revolutionaries. We have had to combat these problems despite the relative fragility of our own ranks. We have seen appalling about-faces; confrontations have followed provocations, and we have seen splits, though nothing is ever permanent.

We have come up against opportunism and watched it at work. It works in various ways to get us to desert the revolutionary struggle and abandon an intransigent defense of the people's interests in the frantic search for personal and selfish advantage. The systematic defense of our revolutionary orientation has led us to combat any idea or conduct that blocks the deepening of the revolution.

For having chosen to follow this path rather than the easier road of demagogy, we have been subjected to ever more slanderous attacks from both our traditional enemies and from elements who have come out of the ranks of the revolution. These elements are either impatient and smitten with the unfortunate zeal of the novice, or else they are frantically and openly pursuing personal ambitions.

Opportunism, just like the counterrevolution, is a thornbush habitually found in the path of the revolution. Until the revolution reaches its final objective — the creation of a new society where exploitation of man by man has ceased — opportunism will continue to show itself at different moments, under different circumstances, and in extremely varied forms, all the way from its most right-wing expressions to its most ultraleft and radical. The difficulties of the struggle, the demands of political activity, the harshness of the class

struggle — all these factors have contributed to some comrades deserting our ranks pure and simple or rushing out ahead of the masses or else simply targeting the wrong enemy.

Others dream of throwing in the towel but have qualms about how they should do it. They also theorize in advance their desertion from the revolutionary struggle. This is why so many theories and ideas, all thoroughly imbued with opportunism, have been — and still are — circulating.

All of this has given rise to hostile elements we have had to combat in order to go forward. Yet we continue to believe that it is only other revolutions that have been and are suffering setbacks and defeats, cooptation by the bourgeoisie, fatal deadlocks, and betrayals.

Our revolution, just like others, is constantly threatened by counterrevolutionary dangers. We must be conscious of this, highly conscious in fact, and firmly commit ourselves to the permanent defense of a correct line that will take us toward our final goal. Above all, we must be conscious that these problems grow up dialectically, from the sharpening of the class struggle. If there were no such problems, it would signify in reality that the revolutionary struggle was being deceitfully quelled in favor of class collaboration.

Comrades, we must take the time today to draw the lessons of our past activity, so that we can enrich the theory and practice of our revolution and deepen our commitment to the struggle in an organized, more scientific, and resolute manner.

The tasks that lie ahead of us are many and complex. The enemies of our people and revolution are working with redoubled energy and ingenuity to bar our road forward. We will need more courage, more conviction, and more determination to keep marching forward. This determination and conviction will come, in part, from the lessons we are able to draw from four years of struggle. This is why we must make our revolution's fifth year a year of critical appraisal of our work, a year of scientifically organized ideological and political work. Yes, we need such an appraisal.

During the four years of our revolution we have carried out many important revolutionary transformations and have laid the basis for solving a number of problems facing our people. We have been very active in many different sectors of our society. We have given the impression that we want to change everything, and immediately. There have been criticisms of us from time to time; we understand this well. Furthermore, we note that other important tasks have been neglected or downplayed. We must devote this fifth year of the revolution particularly to carrying out these tasks, which are of a polit-

ical, ideological, and organizational character.

The deepening of our revolution and the future success of our political activity will depend on how well we solve these problems of organization and political orientation in our country. The revolution cannot go forward and achieve its goals without a vanguard organization able to guide the people in all its battles and on all fronts. Forging such an organization will require a big commitment on our part from now on.

Based on the work we have already carried out in search of solutions to the organizational question, revolutionaries in Burkina must combine their efforts with the goal of overcoming the defects and inadequacies we all share. Unity among revolutionaries is undoubtedly a stage we will have to go through in advancing the organization of the vanguard. I am pleased to note that on this fourth anniversary of our revolution the basis has been laid for building real unity, a militant unity of all the revolutionary forces in our country.

We should, however, guard against a barren, monolithic, paralyzing, and sterile kind of unity. We would rather see the enriching, varied, and manifold expression of many different thoughts and diverse activities. We need thoughts and activities that are rich with a thousand nuances, all put forward courageously and sincerely in the framework of accepting differences and respecting the need for criticism and self-criticism, and all directed toward a single, bright goal, which can be none other than the happiness of our people.

Comrades, the ideological, political, and organizational tasks we must accomplish are of great importance for strengthening our revolution and for sustaining the massive and conscious support of our people for the revolutionary policies we will continue to follow. It will take persistent and rigorous political and ideological work to convince the masses and tear them away from all kinds of backward conceptions that hamper their full commitment to the building of a new society. While the revolution equals repression of the exploiters and our enemies, it can only signify persuasion for the masses — persuasion to take on a conscious and determined commitment to the struggle.

Carrying out the ideological and political work of our revolution is the duty of all revolutionaries, above all of the political leadership. This leadership must strengthen itself and become more effective and demanding of itself in carrying out its mission. This fifth year of the revolution calls on us to throw all our energies into this fight to organize, into this effort to consolidate ourselves politically and ideologically, into putting the question of political leadership first.

In terms of structured political organization, however, what we are saying here excludes our precipitously throwing ourselves into theoretical schemas and concoctions that are stimulating for the mind but of no practical interest for the daily lives of the masses. Let's learn from the experience of other revolutions in history. In particular, let's take into account the experience of those like us — and there are many — who have had to equip themselves with diverse but unified organizations, or a single, diverse organization, at the same time as they organized and defended the state power so worthily conquered through bitter struggle. So let's avoid producing theoretical flow charts from abstract schemas that have no purpose in real life and are of no interest to the masses. This kind of politics is only good for the meditation of a handful of dreamers, or for political fanatics who need self-gratification.

Our revolution is the opposite of this. It is first and foremost a revolution of quality. Its goal is the qualitative transformation of our minds, which will translate itself in practice into building a new Burkinabè society. It is the quality of life that is changing in Burkina, and that is the result of a qualitative evolution of our minds.

The dream of getting rich through a dog-eat-dog struggle, based on what happened in the capitalist jungle of the postwar years, has disappeared forever from Burkina. Our homeland has become a vast construction site where the criteria of morality, concern for social justice, and respect for everyone's fundamental right to live and to enjoy an increasingly better and better life are not just empty words but take material form in the social activity of every one of us.

This is what gives our revolution its specific character, makes it an example, and accounts for its spreading influence. This is what we have defended ferociously until now. And for this we must remain revolutionary, that is, men of flesh and blood, men of feelings and of pure emotions.

It is a fact that occasionally we have made errors in the recent past. This should never happen again on the sacred soil of Faso. All of us must have room in our hearts for those who are not yet in perfect agreement with the Political Orientation Speech and the goals of our five-year plan. It is our job to go to them and win them to the revolutionary cause of the people.

The revolution does not look for shortcuts and yet requires that we all march together, united in thought and in deed. This is why the revolutionary must be a perpetual teacher, a perpetual question mark. And if the masses do not yet understand, it is our fault. We must take the time to explain and convince them so that we can act with them

and in their interests. If the masses do not understand correctly, it is still our fault. We have to correct errors, be more precise, and adapt ourselves to the masses and not try to adapt the masses to our own desires and dreams. Revolutionaries are not afraid of their own mistakes. They have the political courage to admit them publicly, because doing so means committing oneself to correcting them and to doing better. We should prefer one step forward with the masses to ten steps forward without them.

We still have much work to do to broaden out the ranks of committed cadres, male and female. We still have thousands of comrades to mobilize for revolutionary work. This work is above all work to consolidate and deepen the indisputable acquisitions of our revolution.

After four years, we must increase tenfold the attention we pay to critically appraising what has been accomplished. We should reject all triumphal and superficial balance sheets, which are so dangerous over time. Perseverance, tolerance, criticism of others, criticism of ourselves — this is the difficult fight to wage, the revolutionary fight. As revolutionaries we have chosen the difficult road, which means we must go beyond ourselves, surpassing ourselves individually and collectively. There are easier and quicker ways, but these only produce illusions and bitter tomorrows. We will be able to succeed thanks to our revolutionary structures in the workplaces, in the towns, and villages, thanks to our Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the National Movement of Pioneers, the National Union of Elders of Burkina, and the National Union of Peasants of Burkina. These structures need to be perfected and completed. Those whose construction is most in need of our daily effort will be the focus of our attention throughout this fifth year of the revolution.

Comrades, dear friends from countries in Africa, Europe, America, and Asia, in the name of our people and the National Council of the Revolution, I would like to reiterate our thanks for the support you bring to our struggle and to repeat our sincere desire to maintain friendly relations with the peoples of all of your countries. Burkina Faso, land of peace and dignity, will always be present where fraternity and militant, active solidarity are being defended.

Comrades from Houet Province, through your enthusiastic work and your mobilization you have made this fourth anniversary of our revolution an important stepping-stone in the long road of our people's struggle for a bright future. I congratulate you and encourage you to redouble your vigilance and fighting vigor so as to register ever more spectacular successes.

Comrades of the democratic and popular revolution, our revolution is not sadness or bitterness but rather the enthusiasm and pride of an entire people that is taking charge of its destiny and is thereby discovering its own dignity. This is why I invite you to the festival, a festival that is the logical conclusion of work so well-done and that marks the beginning of new and demanding battles so full of promise.

Comrades, I invite you to commit yourself to the work of our revolution's fifth year, to stand collectively on your feet in order to pursue this march we have begun at an even more accelerated pace, but at the same time knowing how to pause — to pause in the pursuit of a certain number of projects, a necessary pause if we are to devote sufficient energies to our organizational, political, and ideological tasks.

I invite you to step forward, to step into the new year that is beginning — a year of struggles, but a year that will allow us to more firmly anchor our revolution and put ourselves at the disposal of the peoples of the world as a contribution to humanity's quest for happiness, refused to them by their enemies, but that we, the peoples gathered here, have a duty to build today, now, and for everyone.

For unity with Ghana! [*Shouts of "Forward!"*]

For a conscious, organized, and mobilized peasantry! [*Shouts of "Forward!"*]

For strengthening the National Union of Peasants of Burkina! [*Shouts of "Forward!"*]

For reducing the gap between town and countryside! [*Shouts of "Forward!"*]

Produce! [*Shouts of "Burkinabè!"*]

Consume! [*Shouts of "Burkinabè!"*]

Live with the masses!

Triumph with the masses!

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

You Cannot Kill Ideas: A Tribute to Che Guevara

October 8, 1987

On October 8, 1987, one week before his assassination, Sankara gave this speech as part of a ceremony honoring the life of Cuban revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara. A Cuban delegation including Guevara's son, Camilo Guevara March, attended.

The ellipses in the text indicate gaps in the tape recording from which this is translated.

This morning, in a modest way, we have come to open this exhibition that tries to trace the life and work of Che. At the same time, we wish to tell the whole world today that for us Che Guevara is not dead. For throughout the world there exist centers where people are struggling for more freedom, more dignity, more justice, more happiness. Everywhere in the world, people are fighting against oppression and domination, against colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism, and against class exploitation.

Dear friends, we join our voices with those elsewhere in the world who remember the day that a man called Che Guevara . . . his heart filled with faith, took up the struggle together with other men and, in so doing, succeeded in creating this spark that so disturbed the forces of occupation in this world . . . and that rang in a new era in Burkina Faso and set into motion a new reality in our country. It is thus that we should understand Che Guevara — Che who wanted to light the fires of struggle everywhere in the world.

Che Guevara was cut down by bullets, imperialist bullets, under Bolivian skies. And we say that for us, Che Guevara is not dead.

One of the beautiful phrases often recalled by revolutionaries — by the great Cuban revolutionaries — is the phrase that Che's friend, his companion in struggle, his comrade, his brother — Fidel Castro — himself repeated. He heard it one day during the struggle from the mouth of a man of the people, one of Batista's officers who, even

though part of that reactionary, repressive army, was able to make an alliance with forces fighting for the well-being of the Cuban people. Those who had just attempted the unsuccessful raid on the Moncada barracks were to be put to death by the guns of Batista's army. Just as they were about to fire, this officer said simply, "Don't shoot, you cannot kill ideas."

It is true, you cannot kill ideas; ideas do not die. That is why Che Guevara — an embodiment of revolutionary ideas, of self-sacrifice — is not dead, and you have come here today, and we draw inspiration from you.

Che Guevara, Argentine according to his passport, adopted Cuban by the blood and sweat he shed for the Cuban people, became, above all, a citizen of the free world — the free world that together we are in the process of building. This is why we say that Che Guevara is also African and Burkinabè.

Che Guevara's beret with its star, *la boina* as he called it, became known all over Africa so that from the north to the south, Africa remembers Che Guevara.

Fearless youth — youth thirsty for dignity, thirsty for courage, thirsty for ideas and for the vitality that he symbolizes in Africa — sought out Che Guevara to drink from the source, the life-giving source that Che's revolutionary heritage represented to the world. Some of those few who had the opportunity and the honor of being close to Che, and who are still alive, are here among us today.

Che is Burkinabè. He is Burkinabè because he participates in our struggle. He is Burkinabè because his ideas give us inspiration and are inscribed in our Political Orientation Speech. He is Burkinabè because his star is stamped on our banner. He is Burkinabè because a part of his thinking lives in each of us in the daily struggle we are waging.

Che is a man, but a man who knew how to show us, to educate us in the idea that we could dare to have confidence in ourselves, confidence in our abilities. Che is among us.

So I would like to ask, what is Che? Che, to us, is above all conviction, revolutionary conviction, revolutionary faith . . . the conviction that victory belongs to us, and that struggle is our only recourse.

Che is also compassion, human compassion — an expression of generosity, of self-sacrifice, that made Che not only an Argentine, Cuban, and internationalist combatant, but also a man, with human warmth.

Che is also, and above all, demanding with the demandingness of one who had the good fortune to be born into a well-off family, an

Argentine family — this certainly says nothing against Argentine families — yet he knew how to turn his back on the easy road; he knew how to say no to those temptations; on the contrary, he showed himself to be a man who makes common cause with the people and with the suffering of others. Che's demanding character is something that should inspire us further.

Conviction, human compassion, a demanding character — all this makes him Che. And all those who are able to combine these qualities in themselves — this conviction, this compassion, and this demandingness — they too can claim to be like Che, men among men, but revolutionaries among revolutionaries.

We have just looked at these pictures that retrace part of Che's life as best they can. Despite their strength of expression, these images . . . cannot speak, yet this is the most determinant part of man, the very part against which imperialism took aim. Imperialism's bullets were aimed much more at Che's spirit than at his image. His picture is found everywhere in the world; his photo is in everyone's mind; and his silhouette is one of the most familiar. So we must strive to know Che better.

So let us draw closer to Che. Let us draw closer to him, but not as we would a god, not as we would the idea — this image placed over and above men — but rather with the feeling that we are moving toward a brother who speaks to us and to whom we can speak as well. We must see to it that other revolutionaries draw inspiration from Che's spirit, that they too become internationalists, that they too, together with other men, know how to build faith — faith in the struggle to change things — to combat imperialism and capitalism.

And you, Comrade Camilo Guevara, we certainly cannot speak of you as an orphaned son. Che belongs to all of us. He belongs to us as a heritage belonging to all revolutionaries. Thus, you cannot feel alone and abandoned, finding as you do in each of us, we hope, brothers and sisters, friends and comrades. You are with us today as a citizen of Burkina, because you have followed resolutely in Che's footsteps, Che who is ours and father to us all.

So let us remember Che simply as this eternal romanticism, this youth, so fresh and invigorating, at the same time as this lucidity, this wisdom, and this dedication that only profound and compassionate men can have. Che was the youth of seventeen years of age. But Che was also the wisdom that comes with seventy-seven years. This judicious combination is one that we should possess permanently. Che was both the heart that speaks and the vigorous . . . stride of action.

Comrades, I would like to thank our Cuban comrades for the effort they have made in order to be with us. I would like to thank all those who traveled thousands of kilometers and crossed oceans to come here to Burkina Faso to remember Che. I would also like to thank everyone whose personal contributions will see to it that this day will not be a mere date on the calendar, but will become days, many days in the year, many days over the years and centuries, when we proclaim the spirit of Che to be eternal.

Comrades, I would finally like to express my joy that we have been able to immortalize the ideas of Che here in Ouagadougou by naming this street Che Guevara.

Every time we think of Che, we will try to be like him, to make this man, the fighter, live again. And especially, every time we think of acting like him, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, in the rejection of bourgeois wealth that tries to alienate us, in refusing the easy path, but also by turning to education and the rigorous discipline of revolutionary morality — every time we try to act in this way, we will have better served Che's ideas and made them known more effectively.

Homeland or death, we will triumph!

Glossary

African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) — leading organization in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle; officially banned since 1960.

Bishop, Maurice — founder and leader of New Jewel Movement (NJM) of Grenada in 1973; prime minister of People's Revolutionary Government following March 13, 1979, overthrow of U.S.-backed dictator Eric Gairy; placed under house arrest and murdered by forces loyal to Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard in October 1983 counterrevolutionary coup.

Cabral, Amílcar — founded African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC) in 1956; assassinated in January 1973 in Guinea by Portuguese agents.

Carrefour africain (African crossroads) — weekly French-language magazine published in Ouagadougou.

Castro, Fidel — led Cuban revolutionary struggle from Sierra Maestra in late 1950s that overthrew U.S.-backed dictator Batista in January 1959; president of Cuba and first secretary, Communist Party of Cuba.

CDR — see Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

CEAO — see West African Economic Community.

CMRPN — see Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress.

CNR — see National Council of the Revolution.

Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comités de Défense de la Révolution — CDRs) — mass organization that began to develop immediately following August 4, 1983; organized in neighborhoods, towns, villages, workplaces, schools, and army units throughout the country and abroad to mobilize support for various social programs of the revolutionary government and to draw people into political activity; organized militia out of CDR ranks; ceased functioning following October 15, 1987, overthrow of revolution; formally dissolved March 18, 1988.

Compaoré, Blaise — captain; led coup that overthrew revolution on October 15, 1987; first met Sankara at parachute school in Rabat, Morocco, in early 1978; as commander of National Training Center for Commandos in Pô, organized and trained forces in support of Sankara following his arrest on May 17, 1983; led march on Ouagadougou, August 4, 1983; member of National Council of the Revolution; minister of state and justice prior to 1987 coup.

Contadora Group — formed January 1983 by foreign ministers of Co-

lombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela to negotiate settlement to Central American conflict.

Contadora Support Group — formed July 1985 by governments of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay to support efforts of Contadora Group.

Council for the Salvation of the People (Conseil de Salut du Peuple — CSP) — politically heterogeneous government established following November 7, 1982, military coup by Col. Gabriel Somé Yoryan; Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo designated president; Comdr. Jean-Baptiste Lingani became permanent secretary in late November; Sankara became prime minister on January 10, 1983; dissolved following May 17, 1983, coup and arrests of Sankara, Lingani, and others.

Diakité, Moussa — Malian director of West African Economic Community's Solidarity and Development Fund; arrested and tried by Burkinabè People's Revolutionary Court in April 1986 for embezzlement of over 6 billion CFA francs from the West African Economic Community; sentenced to fifteen years.

Diallo, Arba — minister of foreign affairs from revolution until August 19, 1984, when first cabinet was dissolved; leader of Patriotic League for Development (Ligue Patriotique pour le Développement — Lipad), organization associated with African Party for Independence (PAI); arrested late 1984; released early 1985.

Diawara, Mohamed — Ivory Coast politician and businessman; arrested and tried by Burkinabè People's Revolutionary Court in April 1986 for embezzlement of over 6 billion CFA francs from the West African Economic Community; sentenced to fifteen years.

Entente Council (Conseil de l'Entente) — founded May 1959 by Dahomey (Benin), Upper Volta, Ivory Coast, and Niger to coordinate and promote joint policy on economic development, trade, investment; Togo joined, 1966.

Five-year plan — began in 1986; centered on raising standard of living of peasants and expansion of agricultural production; forerunner was People's Development Plan.

Fonseca, Carlos — founder of Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) of Nicaragua in 1961 and its central leader until his death in combat at the hands of the Somoza dictatorship on November 8, 1976.

FPV — see Voltaic Progressive Front.

Frelimo — see Mozambique Liberation Front.

Frontline States — Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe; countries of southern Africa closest geographically to apartheid regime of South Africa.

FSLN — see Sandinista National Liberation Front.

Group of Seventy-seven — ad hoc caucus of more than 120 United Nations' members; founded in 1964 to formulate demands and tactics prior to important UN-sponsored conferences on economic development.

Guevara, Ernesto Che — central leader of Cuban revolutionary govern-

ment, 1959-65; led internationalist volunteers in aiding Congolese (Zairian) guerrilla movement, 1965; murdered October 9, 1967, while leading guerrilla movement against Bolivian military dictatorship.

Hart, Armando — member of Cuban Council of State and minister of culture since 1976; member of Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Houphouët-Boigny, Félix — president of Ivory Coast since independence from France, 1960; longtime French political ally in Africa.

Ki-Zerbo, Joseph — Burkinabè historian and proimperialist politician since late 1950s; founder of Voltaic Progressive Front (FPV); unsuccessful candidate for president in 1978; backed November 25, 1980, coup; supported March 1984 attempted teachers' strike and May 1984 coup attempt; lives in self-imposed exile.

Lamizana, Aboubakar Sangoulé — while army chief of staff, came to power in January 3, 1966, military coup against Maurice Yaméogo; elected president in 1978; ousted in November 25, 1980, coup by Col. Saye Zerbo; acquitted of embezzlement charge by People's Revolutionary Court in 1984; became leader of National Union of Elders of Burkina in 1986.

Lingani, Jean-Baptiste Boukary — commander; following coup on November 7, 1982, became permanent secretary of Council for the Salvation of the People; arrested with Sankara during coup on May 17, 1983; member of National Council of the Revolution; army chief of staff; figure in government formed following October 15, 1987, coup.

Lumumba, Patrice — founder and president of Congolese National Movement; first prime minister of Congo (Zaire) after independence from Belgium in June 1960; overthrown and imprisoned three months later in U.S.-backed coup; murdered by captors on January 17, 1961.

Machel, Samora — commander of Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) military forces, 1966-75; elected president of Frelimo in 1970 following assassination of Frelimo founder Eduardo Mondlane; president of Mozambique from independence from Portugal in June 1975 until his death in a plane crash under mysterious circumstances on October 19, 1986, while flying over South Africa.

Mandela, Nelson — central leader of African National Congress; joined ANC in 1944; serving life sentence since June 1964 in South African prison.

Martí, José — Cuban revolutionary, poet, writer, speaker, and journalist; founded Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1892 to fight Spanish rule and oppose U.S. plans to replace Spanish colonial domination; launched 1895 independence war; killed in battle 1895.

Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress (Comité Militaire de Redressement pour le Progrès National — CMRPN) — government formed by Col. Saye Zerbo after November 25, 1980, military coup against General Lamizana.

MNR — see Mozambique National Resistance.

MNP — see National Movement of Pioneers.

Mondlane, Eduardo — first president of Mozambique Liberation Front

(Frelimo); assassinated February 1969 in Dar-es-Salaam by agents of Portugal.

Movement of Nonaligned Countries — founded 1961 by representatives of forty-five governments and national liberation movements in colonial and semicolonial world, including Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah; over 100 governments and national liberation movements represented at Eighth Summit Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1986.

Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique — Frelimo) — founded 1962 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; initiated armed struggle against Portuguese in September 1964; independence won June 1975.

Mozambique National Resistance (Movimento Nacional da Resistencia de Moçambique — MNR) — also known as Renamo; mercenary army created by Rhodesian secret police in 1976 to counter Mozambican aid to Zimbabwean liberation struggle; began receiving aid from South Africa following Zimbabwean independence, 1980.

Mugabe, Robert — president of Zimbabwe; elected chairman of Movement of Nonaligned Countries in September 1986.

National Council of the Revolution (Conseil National de la Révolution — CNR) — governing body formed by Sankara and others with taking of power on August 4, 1983; dissolved with October 1987 coup and murder of Sankara.

National Movement of Pioneers (Mouvement National des Pionniers — MNP) — established May 22, 1985, for children too young to be involved in CDRs.

National Union of African Teachers of Upper Volta (Syndicat National des Enseignants Africains de Haute Volta — SNEAHV) — elementary school teachers' union; right-wing leadership heavily influenced by Voltaic Progressive Front.

National Union of Elders of Burkina (Union Nationale des Anciens du Burkina — UNAB) — launched 1986 to involve elders in support of the revolution.

National Union of Peasants of Burkina (Union Nationale des Paysans du Burkina — UNPB) — launched April 11, 1987, to deal with specific problems of the peasantry, especially implementation of August 1984 land reform.

Ngom, Moussa — Senegalese politician; secretary general of the West African Economic Community from 1976 until arrested and tried by Burkinabè People's Revolutionary Court in April 1986 for embezzlement of over 6 billion CFA francs from the West African Economic Community; sentenced to fifteen years with possible early release after ten years.

Nkomati accord — nonaggression treaty between Mozambique and South Africa signed March 16, 1984; South Africa pledged to end all aid to Mozambique National Resistance and Mozambique pledged to end use of its

territory for transit by ANC fighters entering South Africa; South African aid to MNR continued despite Mozambique's compliance with accord.

Nkrumah, Kwame — led Ghana to independence from Britain in 1957; head of state until February 1966 coup; leading advocate of pan-Africanism; died in exile, 1972.

Nonaligned Movement — see Movement of Nonaligned Countries.

Organization of African Unity (OAU) — founded May 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; now includes virtually all national liberation movements and governments in Africa except South Africa.

Ortega, Daniel — president of Nicaragua and a leader of Sandinista National Liberation Front.

Ouédraogo, Jean-Baptiste — commander; became president November 26, 1982, after November 7, 1982, military coup led by Colonel Somé Yoryan and creation of Council for the Salvation of the People; participated in coup May 17, 1983; overthrown August 4, 1983.

People's Development Program (Programme Populaire de Développement — PPD) — launched October 1984 by National Council of the Revolution; lasted fifteen months; mobilized local population through CDRs for modest-scale construction projects such as roads, dams, sports facilities, and health clinics in countryside.

People's Revolutionary Courts (Tribunaux Populaires de la Révolution — TPRs) — established by National Council of the Revolution on October 19, 1983; sessions convened by government; each court included seven members appointed by the Council of Ministers, including one magistrate, one soldier or police officer, and five drawn from CDRs; first cases heard in January 1984; dealt primarily with counterrevolutionary activity and major cases of corruption.

Pioneers — see National Movement of Pioneers.

Polisario Front — see Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.

Popular Conciliation Courts (Tribunaux Populaires de Conciliation — TPCs) — local-level courts to deal with domestic and community disputes; members were elected at popular assemblies.

Popular Investment Effort (Effort Populaire d'Investissement — EPI) — monetary deductions from salaries of government employees and civil servants; funds were used for development projects.

el-Qaddafi, Muammar — Libyan head of state; came to power in 1969.

Rawlings, Jerry — flight lieutenant; chairman of Provisional National Defence Council of Ghana established by junior officers and civilians on December 31, 1981.

Revolutionary Solidarity Fund (Caisse de Solidarité Révolutionnaire — CSR) — established on November 9, 1983, to provide famine relief to rural population; based on voluntary contributions; by mid-1985 nearly 500 million CFA francs had been collected.

Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) — constituted in former Spanish colony of Western Sahara by Polisario Front (People's Front for the Liberation of Saguía el-Hamra and Río de Oro) on February 27, 1976,

to counter invasions by Morocco and Mauritania; Mauritania forced to withdraw in August 1979; admitted to OAU at 1984 Summit Conference; recognized by seventy governments by early 1988.

Sahel — semiarid region of Africa between the Sahara desert to the north and savannah to the south; includes Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, northern Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Ethiopia; suffered periodic droughts of massive proportions since late 1960s.

Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional — FSLN) — founded 1961 by Carlos Fonseca; in 1963, initiated armed struggle against Somoza dictatorship that culminated in victorious July 19, 1979, revolution.

Sassou Nguesso, Denis — colonel; president of Congo (Brazzaville).

Savimbi, Jonas — leader of UNITA, Angolan counterrevolutionary organization; backed by U.S. and South African governments.

Sidwaya — daily French-language newspaper in Ouagadougou; began publication in 1984.

SNEAHV — see National Union of African Teachers of Upper Volta.

Somé Yoryan, Gabriel — colonel; organizer of November 7, 1982, coup that brought the Council for the Salvation of the People to power; key participant in May 17, 1983, coup against Sankara; killed after National Council of the Revolution came to power while trying to escape from house arrest on August 9, 1983.

Somoza, Anastasio — last of family of dictators that ruled Nicaragua, 1934-79; overthrown by 1979 Sandinista revolution.

South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) — national liberation movement formed on April 19, 1960, to fight for independence for Namibia from South African colonial rule; launched armed struggle in 1966.

TPR — see People's Revolutionary Courts.

Traoré, Moussa — general; president of Mali; came to power in 1968 coup.

UFB — see Women's Union of Burkina.

UNAB — see National Union of Elders of Burkina.

UNPB — see National Peasants Union of Burkina.

Voltaic Progressive Front (Front Progressiste Voltaïque — FPV) — pro-capitalist, proimperialist party led by Joseph Ki-Zerbo; originally founded as National Liberation Movement in 1958; banned by the National Council of the Revolution with taking of power.

West African Economic Community (Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest — CEAO) — formed in January 1974 by Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Upper Volta; replaced West African Customs Union (UDEAO); promotes trade, regional economic development, and specific development projects through customs agreements and loans.

Women's Union of Burkina (Union des Femmes du Burkina — UFB) — mass organization launched in 1986.

Yaméogo, Maurice — first president of Upper Volta; ousted in Jan-

uary 3, 1966, army coup.

Zerbo, Saye — colonel; briefly minister of foreign affairs in government of General Lamizana; overthrew Lamizana in military coup November 25, 1980; organized Military Committee for the Enhancement of National Progress; overthrown by Colonel Somé Yoryan in November 7, 1982, coup; tried and imprisoned for embezzlement by People's Revolutionary Court in May 1984.

Zongo, Henri — captain; evaded arrest following May 17, 1983, coup and briefly organized resistance in Ouagadougou; member of National Council of the Revolution; minister of economic development; figure in government formed following October 15, 1987, coup.

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