

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

BSQ-19

City Hotel  
Box 24  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
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The New Liberia

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Wheelock House  
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Dear Peter,

Monrovia is an American city. It does not just betray its American origins, as Freetown does with its shantytown architecture and Creole speech. Monrovia is a relic of Americana from its rusting Lincoln Continental behemoths to its Norman Rockwell postage stamps.

An American feels at home as soon as he arrives in the country, for the US dollar is the Liberian currency. On the streets of Monrovia, signs of home are pervasive: blue-and-white, hooded litter cans exhorting pedestrians to Pitch In; familiar mailboxes, square bottoms and rounded tops, with the inscription R.L. Mail; traffic cops in the dark blue uniform of New York's finest, complete with silver badge and a heavy revolver carried gunslinger fashion on the hip.

The aptly named Gurley Street is the center of Monrovia's night life. Its bars have names like California Hotel, Eagle Night Club, Saloon. The last-named place is especially popular with the large expatriate American community on Friday nights. Its walls and ceiling are covered with memorabilia of the Old West. Much of it looks authentic: a bullwhip, a single-shot rifle, a straw sombrero, a brass shield with the emblem of the U.S. Marine Corps. The owner, a Yugoslavian, wears a beat-up, army-green cowboy hat, not a gleaming white Roy Rogers ten-gallon, as he serves drinks behind the bar; but there are also signs of the new Old West, movie posters and a magazine-cover photo of John Wayne in cavalry uniform with the legend "America—Why I Love Her."

Other bars display more recent American culture—raised dance floors of colored glass tiles with flashing lights beneath. The popularity of disco is not special to Monrovia. John Travolta is painted on bar walls in Sierra Leone, too, in his Saturday Night Fever pose—white three-piece suit, arm over head—accompanying the likes of Bob Marley and Donna Summer, as well as African singers. Monrovia, though, may be the only African city with an FM rock station; "89.9, the sound of the city," coos the female voice in standard rock radio hype.

At one end of Broad Street, the main commercial avenue, a KingBurger recently opened. It is Monrovia's first true fast-

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food emporium. Other restaurants make the boast; Roosters even serve fried chicken as quick as you can say, "The colonel sent me," but they don't have the features that make McDonald's a place you want to bring the family to on Saturday night. King-Burger does--the glass front, the cheery plastic interior, uniformed counter girls, greasy shoestring fries, your choice of assorted burgers and dogs, or chicken for the finicky, milk shakes and soda, even the cardboard-boxed fruit pastries revolving in a lighted glass-and-metal cabinet. Liberia has added one feature--beer is also available.

Another culinary feature of the city is the ice-cream-parlor-cum-bake-shop. The ice cream comes out of stainless steel machines à la Dairy Queen. The most popular baked goods are corabread and shortbread. When they come out of the oven, they are put in display windows at the front of the store to draw in customers. These shops also have the large glass popcorn-makers found in movie theaters in the States, but they seem to have gone out of style. I never saw a sale, and the layer of popcorn at the bottom of all the cases seemed to have lain there for a while. Still, plastic bags of popcorn are sold on the street, so someone must be eating it.

Monrovia has a seedy vitality that I've found nowhere else in West Africa. With a population of 200,000, it is less than half the size of Freetown, yet it is a much more bustling city, and more modern. No handcarts block the rush of traffic on the main streets. The stores and offices on Broad Street are more fashionable than those on Freetown's Siaka Stevens Street. The airline agencies are bright and airy. The elegant jewelry shops are dim and hushed. There were few customers in either, but it is not yet the tourist season.

The city could be the cologne retailing capital of Africa. Clothes stores, drug stores, record stores, gift stores, all had shelves and shelves of fragrances and cosmetics, providing a much greater variety than I've ever seen in the States. Shoes also seem to be big sellers. Many stores display wide selections. Clothing is in much less abundance, but vendors roam the streets with bundles of material to be taken to the tailor shops.

Monrovia's modernity cannot hide its poverty. Blackened stone ruins stand in grassy lots even on Broad Street, and behind the new office buildings are the corrugated-metal shacks of the poor. Young men on the sidewalk sell candy and cigarettes from wooden trays, women and girls sell bananas, peeled oranges, peanuts, stewed meat, fried fish and greasy lumps of dough. Most of the people crowding the sidewalks are going nowhere. They have no jobs and no money.

Monrovia has imbibed American culture, unlike Dakar where the French influence seems imposed and artificial. One sees the inhabitants of two worlds in Dakar--the rich francophile, black or white, and the poor African--and one accepts it because French culture is elitist. The sidewalk cafes, the bookstores, the patisseries are for the wealthy and the educated. The poor live in a world apart, even if it is a world underfoot. Amer-

ican culture is supposed to be different. Fast food, ice cream parlors and disco are for everyone. American culture is democratic, low cost, readily available. Its commonness gives it its class. Cheapness is its mark of quality. In Monrovia, where cornbread is a delicacy, where the street urchins watch through the glass as people eat their Kingburgers, where the discos charge admission to Liberians but not to the free-spending whites, American culture is a travesty.

American culture first came to this ridged peninsula called Cape Mesurado in the forms of the Bible and the gun. In 1821 two agents for the US government and for the church-led American Colonization Society drew their pistols to force the local ruler, King Peter, to listen to their demand for land. The king reluctantly agreed to the sale; he remained strongly opposed to the idea of a settlement. The colonists, initially thirty-three liberated blacks and four white agents, lived on a small island in the mouth of the Mesurado River while they frantically worked to establish a permanent settlement on the cape. They had the examples of the harsh first years of the Freetown settlement, 200 miles to the west, and of the failure of an earlier American Colonization Society venture up the coast to teach them the high cost of being unprepared for the start of the rainy season. On April 28, 1822, just as the rains began, they moved into the new town they called Christopolis.

The American Colonization Society was the product of antagonistic forces in the United States that in another forty years would tear the country apart. In the North a strong evangelical movement had led to questions about the morality of slavery. Such righteousness came more easily as the North became populous and industrialized. Wage-earning workers who would buy the products of the factories were needed for growth and prosperity. In the plantation fields of the South, slave labor was essential for the economy. Even so, many southerners manumitted their slaves for long service, diligence or just from a change of heart. As communities of free blacks grew, southerners saw them as a pernicious influence on the slaves. Although the American Colonization Society was started and led by northern preachers, it derived most of its funding from the South. Northerners saw the colonization movement as a step toward ending slavery; southerners considered it a means of strengthening the institution.

Despite their industriousness, the Christopolis settlers were in dire straits during their first rainy season. Many fell victim to the climate and disease of West Africa. Rather than improving relations with the surrounding natives, the settlers had antagonized them further by firing on some who were attempting to take cargo from a wrecked ship. The natives prepared for war, and the enfeebled colony was in no shape to repel them. Christopolis might have met the same fate as Granville Town, the first settlement in Sierra Leone, which was destroyed by angry

tribesmen, if not for the arrival in August of thirty-five more blacks and a white man named Jehudi Ashmun. He had come to trade but the hostility of the natives prevented that. He had failed as a teacher in the States and had come to Africa to earn money to pay off his debts, but he proved to be a born leader of men. With no military training, he had a flair for military tactics, especially given an overwhelming technical superiority. He directed the construction of a battlement that could criss-cross cannon fire about the settlement, and he drilled the settlers into a fighting unit. When the natives attacked three months after Ashmun's arrival, the settlers were ready. Although vastly outnumbered they decimated the attackers, losing only four of their own.

Richard West, author of Back to Africa, a history of Liberia and Sierra Leone, quotes from Ashmun's journal describing the battle: "Imagination can scarcely figure to itself a throng of human beings in a more capital state of exposure to the destructive power of the machinery of modern warfare! Eight hundred men were pressed shoulder to shoulder, in so compact a form that a child might easily walk upon their heads from one end of the mass to the other, presenting in their rear a breadth of rank equal to twenty or thirty men, and all exposed to a gun of great power raised on a platform at only thirty to sixty yards distance! Every shot literally spent its force in a solid mass of living human flesh."

The blood spilled that day would be horribly avenged more than 150 years later.

Firmly planted on African soil, the colony grew slowly, stunted by the contradictions of its origin in America. Like the British colony at Sierra Leone, it was meant to receive freed slaves from captured slaving ships. Unlike Britain, however, the United States never made much of an effort to halt the trade, although the government had declared it illegal in 1808 and had agreed in the Treaty of Ghent, which ended war with Britain in 1815, to try its best to end the traffic. While Freetown received tens of thousands of Negroes out of the hulls of slave ships in the first half of the nineteenth century, Liberia received hardly any. Only a trickle of emigrants came from America to augment the colony. Many of these were former slaves for whom emigration was a condition of freedom. For the most part, free blacks in the United States did not want to return to Africa.

The American Colonization Society became the target of the abolitionists in the US, led by firebrand William Lloyd Garrison. He considered the society an affront to the Negro in America and in Africa, and as a subtle aid to the slave owner and the slave trader. The colonization movement took away support for the abolitionists' campaign, so it was their first target. The issue, Garrison wrote, was not "whether the climate of Africa is salubrious, nor whether the colony is in a prosperous condition, nor whether the transportation of our whole colored population can be effected in thirty years or three centuries, nor whether any slaves have been emancipated on condition of

banishment, but whether the doctrines and principles of the Society accord with the doctrines and principles of the Gospel, whether slaveholders are the just proprietors of their slaves, whether it is not the sacred duty of the nation to abolish the system of slavery now and to recognize the people of color as brethren and countrymen who have been unjustly treated and covered with unmerited shame."

Beleaguered by its abolitionist foes, the American Colonization Society could no longer afford to support its venture. As the battle lines formed in the US, the country forgot about its African offshoot. The American government had never accepted responsibility for the colony, colonization being regarded as antithetical to the republic's fundamental philosophy. The government apparently remained unimpressed when the settlers changed the name of Christopolis to Monrovia in 1844 to honor the memory of the president who had aided the founding of the colony. The most well-wishers could do was urge the territory to declare its independence, something the colonists did not seem all that anxious for.

In 1839 the settlement on Cape Mesurado came to an agreement with a nearby settlement of freed slaves founded by the Mississippi Colonization Society. They formed the Commonwealth of Liberia. A similar settlement started by the Maryland Colonization Society stayed outside the fold until 1857. In 1847 the commonwealth became a republic. Britain, which saw in the new country a boon to its manufacturers and traders without the headaches of colonial administration, recognized the new state in 1848. France and most other European countries followed suit. The United States, not wanting a Negro diplomat to inflame tempers further in volatile Washington, withheld recognition until 1862, when the Civil War had ended the government's concern for southern susceptibilities.

Liberia was the first black republic in Africa. Haiti had become the first modern black state in 1804, following years of bloody slave revolts. The ancient empire of Ethiopia is the only black nation that has withstood the centuries of northern aggression, first Arab and later European. As Richard West points out, Liberia gained its independence so easily in 1847 because a self-governing black state posed no threat to the Western powers at that time. It was only as the European nations became possessive of land at the end of the nineteenth century because of their mutual suspicions and jealousies that the myth of blacks being unable to govern themselves became fashionable. In this way Europeans eased their consciences and ignored the evils of colonialism, just as they had rationalized slavery by propagating the idea that the Negro was subhuman. "Had Liberia asked for her independence in 1947, rather than 1847," West observes, "many people would no doubt have said that it was not yet ripe for self-government."

For almost 25 years after independence, as for most of the 25 years before it became a nation, Liberia was a small but prosperous state. Coffee, cotton and sugar cane were grown for export, and the rich soil readily produced food crops for local

consumption. As it does today, the Liberian flag—a copy of the American but with a single star in the blue field—flew over cargo ships that plied the Atlantic. Yet tensions were growing between two groups in the small population of immigrants and their descendants, who probably numbered less than 10,000 in 1870. So-called pure blacks struggled with mulattoes for political control of the country. The antagonisms broke out in violence after Edward James Roye, a pure black, was elected president in 1870. A year later ~~the~~ Liberian Congress deposed him and former President Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a mulatto, was reinstalled in power. Roye died soon after, either murdered in prison or drowned trying to escape.

It may be more than coincidence that the factional violence broke out just at the time that Liberia's economy declined. The decline was due to a number of factors. The international economic situation entered an extended period of instability around 1870. While demand for African agricultural products increased, prices fell. Liberia was especially hard hit by competition from Brazil for the coffee market. The price of Liberian coffee dropped from 24 cents a pound in 1870 to four cents a pound by the end of the century. The growth of the beet sugar industry in Europe, backed by government subsidies, crippled Liberia's sugar cane trade. As an independent country, Liberia was hurt by the advance of protectionism in Europe and restrictive trade practices that went along with the spread of colonialism. Competition from European shipping lines, which were favored by European trading and manufacturing firms, put Liberia's fleet out of business.

In misguided attempts to improve the economy, the Liberian government entered into some disastrous financial deals with the British government and private industry. By 1911 the country was nearly bankrupt. Suspicious of British intentions, Liberia turned to the US for aid, and quickly became dependent on America. It was an American company, however, not the government, that turned Liberia into an economic colony.

As Henry Ford put the nation on wheels, Americans began to worry about what went round them. In 1922 the English, who controlled the rubber industry through their domination of Malaysia, jacked up prices, which went from 15 cents a pound to \$1.23 a pound in three years. Tire manufacturer Harvey Firestone decided to do something about it. He made a deal with the Liberian government for a ninety-nine year lease on a million acres of forest, and in the bargain gained a large amount of control over the Liberian economy. Soon Liberia was little more than a subsidiary of the Firestone Rubber Company.

European countries, especially Britain, were outraged at American penetration into a continent and an industry they considered their own. England began a campaign to divest Liberia of its sovereignty and make it a League of Nations mandated territory. To do this, it focused attention on the hitherto ignored relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous tribes. Stories of Liberian government officials selling native Krus as slave labor made international headlines.

For a while even the US government withdrew recognition of Liberia. The furor died down as it became clear that England was using the issue, which had some truth to it but was not peculiar to Liberia, to try to discredit the government and its American backers.

Few people were really interested in the fate of the Liberian natives. With the rise of rubber prices in the Thirties, prosperity returned to the country. The American presence increased with the advent of World War II as the US built an airbase in the country. Later, Liberia became the site of a Voice of America radio transmitter. American banks—Chase Manhattan, Citibank—moved in to facilitate the flow of money out of the country. Liberia did not remain an American preserve, however, as Swedish and other European companies came in to help with the exploitation of mineral reserves and the importation of European manufactured goods.

The Americo-Liberians benefited enormously from the infusion of foreign capital, but the most political and economic power came into the hands of a few families, notably the Tubmans and the Tolberts. William V.S. Tubman became president in 1944 and served in that capacity until his death in 1971, when he was succeeded by his vice-president of twenty years, William R. Tolbert. Throughout their careers both men said that divisions between the settlers' descendants and the natives were being erased, just as the division between the black and the mulatto among the immigrants had gradually disappeared. Neither man made his actions fit his words.

"He (Tubman) said to him (Tolbert), 'I love power, but you love money. I live like a king and I will die like a king. You live like a dog and you will die like a dog.'"

That story, told to me in Monrovia by the new director of national security, a Kru, is probably apocryphal, part of a mythology that has sprung up almost overnight to explain the creation of the new Liberia. Monrovia is full of stories now, stories of the events of the last six months. For the start of the revolution, however, people go back eighteen months to April 14, 1979, a Saturday. When one talks about the killing of President Tolbert, that is where one begins or ends. No one in Monrovia seems to derive much pleasure or satisfaction from the assassination, but almost invariably a person shrugs and says, "He was warned."

If he had never realized their extent before, the rice riot that tore the city apart that Saturday should have opened the president's eyes to the anger and the frustration of the people. Lamini Waritay, editor of the New Liberian newspaper, who saw the worst of the outpouring of hate in this year's coup, said it couldn't compare with the fury of the riot. The trigger was a small rise in the cost of rice, but the anger was deep-seated. Estimates of the number of people killed by the police range from twenty-nine to more than 100. Tolbert blamed the Progressive Alliance of Liberia, an opposition group, and ordered the

arrest of its leader, Gabriel Baccus Matthews. The president also blamed the students and closed the University of Liberia. Other than those actions, he did little of consequence.

A year later the situation had apparently calmed down. Monrovia was preparing for a mayoral election. The PAL announced it would register as a political party to contest the election. Despite its claim of ensuring democratic freedoms, the Tolbert government prevented PAL's political registration. Matthews called for a national strike in protest. Tolbert said the government had uncovered a coup attempt and again threw the PAL leaders in jail. On April 12, another Saturday, Samuel Doe, a 28-year-old master sergeant in the Liberian army, and a few other low-ranking soldiers snuck into the palatial Executive Mansion, went to the president's bedroom, shot Tolbert and declared they had taken over the government. There was little resistance.

The soldiers had no apparent political connections or ideology before the coup. They have brought into the government Matthews, as foreign minister, and the leader of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), another group that was opposed to the reigning True Whig Party. Observers disagree as to whether the incorporation of civilians in the government was a show of sympathy with their leftist views, an effort at a national coalition or an attempt to neutralize the opposition. It is difficult to say at this point who is running the government or in what direction it is heading. Monrovia remains an unsettled community. The people who welcomed the soldiers as saviours have had second thoughts.

Roberts International Airport is thirty-five miles from the capital and taxi drivers make a killing on the foreigners that come in. The official fare to the city is \$22.50; I was told \$25. I said I'd take a bus. No bus, the drivers assured me. I said I'd split the fare with some other passengers. The drivers insisted all the other passengers had already departed. I stuck my head into the front window of a taxi and asked the white man in the back seat if he wanted to share a ride. Sure, he said. The taxi driver sped off before he could get out or I could get in.

I finally got into a car with one other passenger, an African. As I climbed in the back, I saw a slip of paper pass between the seats in front, with the figures "10.00" written on it. I was resolved not to pay a penny more.

A few miles from the airport the road goes by an army camp. Gun-toting soldiers, bored, greedy, unsupervised, had set up a roadblock. Three taxis were pulled over, passengers were opening their suitcases. We stopped, got out, opened the trunk. The cars ahead left; perhaps a soldier waved to my driver to pull ahead. He and the other passenger got back in the car, but it pulled out before I could get in. I had to walk about twenty yards to rejoin them. When I reached the car, the soldiers were reprimanding the driver for his treatment of me. They looked through the bags perfunctorily. As I started getting back in the car, a soldier told me to change to a taxi that had pulled



up in front. They would detain my driver for making me walk.

I didn't understand at first. Liberian English is not a creole, but it is spoken in a thick accent with much dropping of consonants. I protested, thinking I was going to be detained as well. The soldier gave up trying to explain and we took off. A few yards down the road another soldier waved us to a halt and spoke to me through the window. He had two youngsters with him and they all tried to ask me something, but again I couldn't comprehend. The driver started to speak, but the soldier cut him off sharply. I looked at the driver and saw that his eyes were watery with fear. After another futile attempt to get through to me, the soldier impatiently waved us off.

A little further down the road, another soldier tried to flag us down, wanting a ride. The driver slowed, then passed him. Although the soldier was unarmed, I thought I had seen others nearby with guns. I wondered whether the back windshield would be shattered by bullets. I don't think it was an idle fear; the driver and the passenger cast back furtive glances before we got out of range.

After that, the driver was a bit more pleasant to me, and he took my \$10 without protest.

The soldiers are everywhere in Monrovia. Many carry guns for no apparent reason other than liking the feel of it slung across their shoulders. I met an American businessman on the plane back to Freetown, a light-skinned, Haitian-born Negro. It was raining when he had come through the checkpoint on the way to Monrovia. For \$2 the soldiers let him stay in the car without opening his luggage. One night making the rounds of the bars with a local business acquaintance, a Lebanese, he noticed a soldier with a submachine gun tailing them. Every time they entered a bar, he followed, sitting quietly in a corner alone, except he stayed out of the last place. When they came out of that, he was sitting a few yards away, his gun pointed their way. The American paused, lit a cigarette. The soldier never said a word. Perhaps he was acting as a bodyguard.

I got to know Lamini Waritay through Pios Foray, the editor of The Tablet here in Freetown. They were classmates at Fourah Bay College and started the paper together. Waritay's father had a government job, and family pressure combined with official displeasure drove him away after a year. He was features editor at the New Liberian, a government-owned paper, at the time of the coup. When the bosses at the paper were removed, simply told over the radio not to report to their jobs, Waritay, a frail 27-year-old, inherited the top spot, editor-in-chief. A few days later he made the mistake of printing a letter that complained the soldiers were acting just like the old rulers, riding around in Mercedes, moving into the mansions.

Armed soldiers showed up at the office. Waritay, the supervising editor and the deputy editor were questioned. Panic seized the deputy. He wept and claimed he had no editorial responsibility. It was the other two who had decided to run the letter, he said. Waritay later pointed out to him that he needn't have added that last comment. A disgusted soldier called him a woman and told him to get out.

When he first told me the story, Waritay claimed he wasn't afraid because he had done nothing wrong. Later, when I heard

him tell it again, he admitted that the condition of the soldiers frightened him. They were out of control. Some were drunk, some were high. As Waritay and the other editor were being marched into the ministry of information, another soldier yelled to their captors to find out what they had done.

These are the editors of the paper that had the letter, came the reply.

"Then why bother?" Waritay remembered the first soldier asking. "Spray them."

The soldiers showed enough restraint not to spray their prisoners. The two men spent ten hours at the ministry trying to explain freedom of the press to the soldiers, some of whom couldn't read and all of whom couldn't see the logic of letting a government paper print something critical of the government. At last, word came to release them.

The soldiers ran amok for the first few days after the coup. One still sees the signs. The New Liberian's offices are in the Roye building on Ashmun Street. It has a vacant look. Soldiers took anything they thought they could use or sell—air conditioners, furniture, typewriters. Someone appropriated the paper's staff car. At the airport the duty-free shop is closed, its goods looted by the soldiers. A few bullet holes pock the windows, although there should have been no fighting there.

The height of the hysteria came ten days after the coup with the public execution of 13 former government and True Whig Party officials. Waritay was there; the press, foreign and local, were almost a captive audience. Reporters had been called to a press conference in the Executive Mansion and from there were sent to the execution site, unaware of what they were going to see. One day over lunch, Waritay described with regret what he had seen, the terror of the condemned men, the taunting and laughing of the soldiers. It was hundreds of years of anger coming out, he said.

That was an exaggeration, the settlers having arrived only 159 years ago, but it was not far away from the execution site that King Peter's tribesmen had been mowed down by the settlers' cannon.

Waritay left after the first round of killings, making his way through the crowd inconspicuously so as not to draw attention to his departure and perhaps anger the soldiers. He walked the streets of Monrovia for an hour and a half trying to calm down. His reaction should be accepted as the average Liberian's response to the killings. Historically and culturally, Africans are non-violent peoples. The executions were no more typical of Liberians than the MyLai massacre was typical of Americans.

The situation now is uncertain, contradictory.<sup>o</sup> Ostensibly, government policies are reformist and moderate. A burdensome hut tax has been lifted. Income taxes on salaried workers have been increased and made more progressive. Military and civil servant pay has been upped. Foreign investment is encouraged. The government says it will maintain a capitalist economy and plans to transfer money-losing public corporations to private

hands. Doe has repeatedly called on soldiers not to molest private citizens. An army captain was removed from the ruling People's Redemption Council for assaulting and ordering the arrest of a hospital doctor.

Yet there are signs that the army's revolutionary ardor will chase off foreign investors. The PRC has assigned officers to make recommendations for improvements in foreign-owned or foreign-run businesses. Suggestions I saw for changes in the Monrovia Breweries would scare away almost any Western businessman. Among the items was automatic loans upon request for any employee. Another demand, for worker participation in decision making, may be consistent with the government's stated objectives but it is unlikely to be welcomed by foreign managers.

More disturbing are the signs that the new rulers are succumbing to the seductions of power that erode good intentions and turn self-interest into oppression. Waritay complained about two female students sent to him for vacation jobs. They had no journalistic experience or training, but they were relatives of PRC members. The cafeteria beneath the newspaper's offices used to be run by the families of influential Americo-Liberians; now it is run by relatives of the PRC. The food is cheaper, but it is these minor abuses of power to help a cousin or an in-law that harden into a system of corruption. At the moment, commandeering cars and occupying houses is simple lawlessness; soon the entitlements of office may be given the strength of law.

Much may depend on Samuel Doe. He has shown a surprising amount of leadership for a young man trained to take and transmit orders, not to give them. One has to wonder if there are powers behind the throne. Waritay has heard that Doe is eager to hand over power to the civilians but is being urged to remain in office by his army colleagues. Matthews told the UN recently that the country may keep to its schedule for elections in 1983. More recently, a PRC spokesman told Liberians and foreign residents "not to be only concerned about when the army would return to the barracks, but what they together with the army would do to reconstruct the country."

While I was in Monrovia, the radio began broadcasting a poem to Our Redeemer, repeating it several times a day. It was heady stuff for a young master sergeant.

The revolution has a motto: "In the cause of the people, the struggle continues." Doe concludes his speeches with it. Tee-shirts sold on the street have it printed beneath his picture. Yet already in some quarters it is spoken with a wry smile, a hint of derision. The suspicion grows that it is cant, newspeak designed to make the truth a lie and a lie the truth.

Right now, people are more worried about the economy than democracy. Liberia's economy was ruined in the last five years of the Tolbert regime by unwise and unproductive investment of foreign loans. Private investment has dried up as foreigners wait to see the outcome of the coup. Thousands of Liberians have come to Monrovia from rural areas to enjoy the fruits of the revolution, but all they find is the bitter taste of unem-

ployment and poverty. Crime has increased alarmingly, despite a 1 a.m. to dawn curfew.

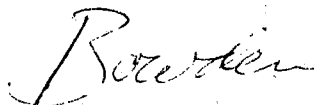
Liberians expect the US to help. They feel the aid is owed them because America backed the former regime, pouring money into the country while turning a blind eye to the people's suffering. Repeatedly, they made this point to me. In the words of the national security director, America has to help solve the problem of Liberia's poverty, "or we'll go east, man, we'll go east." It was not meant as a threat, just a prediction.

Liberia will no longer be a docile follower of US dictates, "America's best friend in Africa." Doe can be expected to prove his non-aligned credentials with more ventures like the August trip to Ethiopia and the joint communique criticizing American military aid to Somalia. More socialist rhetoric will probably seep into the government's pronouncements. It would be a great mistake for shortsighted congressmen to withhold aid because of such signs of independence.

If it is wise, the US will do all it can to help Liberia out of its financial difficulties, and leave the political arm-twisting to West African leaders. Nigerian President Shehu Shagari has already shown that he will use strong diplomatic pressure to restrain excesses by Liberia's military rulers. Sierra Leone President Siaka Stevens, certainly displeased by events next door to his restive political fiefdom, will use whatever power he has as chairman of the Organization of African Unity to see that the Liberian government remains moderate.

Monrovia is an American city, but Liberia is now truly an African country. Liberian friendship and respect for the US is probably as strong as any country's in Africa. If the US earnestly helps the new government without trying to dictate how it acts, that will remain the case. As to how much the Liberian people will benefit from US aid, that is up to the new rulers.

Regards,



Rowden Quinn.

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