

the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta I would have since become a revolutionary." Someone else agreed with Passe but noted that, "the objective conditions in our individual communities necessitate our becoming revolutionaries."

On getting home to Cameroon, one of the delegates wrote to say that, "After the meeting, I can renew my engagement (that of my organisation) to resist oil activities based on human exploitation, destruction of the forest and environment, non-respect of human rights and dignity. We must win the battle."

THE LAWFUL STIFLING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The Nigerian state has been piloted either by the men with the "fastest gun" or those who make the highest bid (apologies to Professor Wole Soyinka) at what in popular euphemism are known as elections. Because the helmsmen are not popularly chosen they have no real commitment to meet the aspiration of the civil society. Years of military rule have deadened the sensitivity of the people to the power that lies within their grasp. Consequently, power has continued to be issued from the barracks either directly or remotely. The political arena has become a market place.

Our series of transitional governments have now turned many of our communities into transitional societies. The transitional governments are endlessly in search for foreign exchange for the repayment of old and not-so-old debts. The oil TNCs offer them the "cheapest" means of obtaining the needed foreign exchange. In this scenario, civil society is seen as an obstacle that must either be ignored or eliminated. The pampering of these TNCs has led to the permission of harmful environmental practices and the erection of permissive, anti-people environmental laws. The total effect has been the impoverishment of the people, the emasculation of civil society and the destruction of the environment. Seeing that the political class is set to snuff the life out of the people, groups have sprouted in great profusion to speak up on one front or the other. This awakening of civil society needs the encouragement of everyone particularly in the area of alliance building to harness/optimize resources to meet the powerful anti-people forces at work in the field. When civil society is able to forge credible alliances on issues they will be in a position to determine what gets priority attention in national discourse and thereon to the political arena.

AN INNOCUOUS WAR

The 1966-70 Biafra/Nigeria civil war provided a good cover not only for the military to firm its grip on the political seats, it also presented the environment for the enactment of laws which in real terms meant a declaration of perpetual war on civil society. The effect of the unitary formation of the Nigerian State is only now being loudly pronounced through conflict and much bloodshed.

One of such laws is The Petroleum Act of 1969: Cap 350, LFN, 1990), which some have compared to laws enacted by the apartheid regime of South Africa in those days of infamy. For all practical purposes, this decree appropriated or confiscated the oil and gas resources of the fragile