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LIBERATING AREAS, EXPLOITING PEOPLE: THE 'OLD' SPLA

We did not start as a Movement in the classical way of Latin American liberation movements with a small group of men. We started as a mob. We have been in a series of reforms, reforming a mob.

*Dr John Garang*¹

There are those who feel that it is hardly conceivable for a guerrilla unit to exist for a long period behind enemy lines. This is a viewpoint based on ignorance of the relations between the army and the people. The popular masses are like water, and the army is like a fish. How can it be said that when there is water, a fish will have difficulty in preserving its existence? An army which fails to maintain good discipline gets into opposition with the popular masses, and thus by its own actions dries up the water. In this case, it naturally cannot continue to exist. All guerrilla units must thoroughly understand this principle.

*Mao Zedong*²

¹ Opening address to SPLM Conference on Civil Society and the Organisation of Civil Authority of the New Sudan, New Kush, 30 April 1996.

² Quoted in 'Mao's Military Principles,' in L. Freedman (ed.) *War*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 321.

THE EARLY ORIENTATION OF THE SPLA

The humanitarian policy of the SPLA must be seen in the light of its political orientation and practical approach to the liberation of Sudan.

For the first six years after its inception in 1983, the SPLA was an unusual guerrilla army in that it could readily outnumber its opponents in the field. Until 1989 the Sudan Armed Forces numbered about 65,000, of which no more than half could be deployed in the war zones at any one time.³ Most of the latter were Southern, former Anyanya forces. Most of the government's fighting was done by militias, notably Anyanya II, the *Murahaliin*, the Mandari and the Murle. By 1989 over 70,000 SPLA troops graduated from training camps in Ethiopia. The SPLA forces were more numerous, better armed, often better trained, and had a more formal command structure than many of the pro-government forces they fought against.

The SPLA's de facto military philosophy was derived less from the principles of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara than the practice of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, President of Ethiopia. Mengistu fused traditional Ethiopian doctrines of massed armies with Soviet belief in the power of numbers. Massive, forced conscription and rudimentary training was the characteristic of the revolutionary Ethiopian army.⁴ This force, that numbered over 400,000 at its peak, aimed to conquer territory metre by metre, mile by mile. Mengistu's generals mounted 'human wave' attacks against the Somalis and Eritreans that have been compared to the Somme and the North Koreans. Foot soldiers were regarded as expendable: Mengistu believed that with forty million Ethiopians (as against six million Somalis and three million Eritreans) he had

³ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1988-1989*, London, Brassey's, 1988; also see 1992 edition. Some estimates for the government military strength are slightly higher.

⁴ Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, London, 1991, chapter 17.

demography on his side. (History proved otherwise.) The aim was to control territory, not to win the willing support of the people.

Sadly for thousands of Southern Sudanese young men, the Ethiopian element was prominent in SPLA military doctrines. In early assaults on the small border garrison of Jekau, SPLA soldiers did not even take cover, but simply rushed the Sudanese army machine guns.

The early political orientation of the SPLA reflected both the experience and outlook of the younger generation of Southern Sudanese radical politicians, and Ethiopian influence. The SPLM Manifesto of 1983 was unlike party manifestos in liberal democracies. It was not a detailed outline of proposed policies, such as providing services and guaranteeing rights: the single objective was to achieve 'a united socialist Sudan'. What the content of socialism in the Sudan might be, was not set out. This was a question which was deferred until such time as the war had been won. The SPLA strategy was not to mobilise the people in pursuit of a political aim, so much as to capture state power, and then use that power to effect a radical transformation of Sudanese society. This reflected the state socialist (or, less kindly, 'Afro-Stalinist') approach of Mengistu. While Mengistu ruled Ethiopia, the SPLA used Ethiopian state power as part of its structures of control and transformation. In the Ethiopian refugee camps, the SPLA was a government. In rebel-held areas of Sudan it sought to recreate these conditions, and since the defeat of Mengistu, it has sought an external backer prepared to play the same role.

Hence, the SPLM 'Manifesto' is a different kind of document. It is an interpretation of Sudanese history, concluded with a summary agenda for winning state power with the aim of a radical transformation of the state. It uses historical-determinist language. The greatest weakness in the Manifesto was the gap between establishing the validity of the cause and a realistic political strategy for realising its goals.

The Manifesto makes an interesting contrast with many Southern Sudanese presentations of their case (and indeed speeches and writings by Dr John Garang), which argue that Southern Sudan has historical grievances and a powerful case for justice, concluding with constitutional

proposals to guarantee rights. The trajectory of the argument is similar—from history to the current struggle—but the Manifesto is not founded on the human values of redressing wrongs.

The Manifesto introduced the war plan as a 'strategy to transform the Southern Movement into a genuine liberation movement', but here 'liberation' is used only in the sense of 'conquest'. Mostly it is about building the army. The one clause which treats the relationship between the Movement and its local populations runs:

Politicization, organization and militarization of the peasantry shall follow as areas become liberated.

This was the liberation of areas, not of people. People—here reduced to the category of 'peasantry', which has uncertain relevance to Sudan—were seen as the means, rather than the purpose, of the struggle. Even disabled veterans of the struggle were rarely cared for.

Ethiopia and Sudan: A History of Antagonism

Ethiopia and Sudan had supported each other's rebel movements in the 1960s; mainly on the one hand the Anyanya guerrillas, and on the other the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) which was later superseded by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The Ansar opposition to Nimeiri also fled en masse to Ethiopia in 1970 after Nimeiri's assault on the Ansar stronghold of Aba Island: some military camps close to the border remained until 1985. After the settlement of the Anyanya war in 1972, this antagonism by proxy was subdued for a while, but when the Dergue took power in Ethiopia, the hostility re-ignited. The Sudan Government warmed again to the Eritrean fronts and, most significantly, supported the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) in its military struggle against the Dergue. The EDU proved militarily ineffective.

By 1977 the antagonism between Sudan and Ethiopia had become part of the Cold War line-up. The Soviet Union began supplying large

quantities of arms to Ethiopia: Cuba sent military, ideological and technical trainers and advisers. Sudan meanwhile began to receive economic and military support from the United States. One of the particular U.S. aims was to assist President Nimeiri in his resistance to Gadaffi's unpredictable ambitions in the region. Later, Sudan's support was mobilised for the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel.

After the Dergue's failure to dislodge the EPLF in the huge 'Red Star' offensive of 1982—despite Nimeiri allowing it to send its tanks through Sudanese territory to outflank the rebels—relations again deteriorated. President Mengistu assumed that the Sudanese President had the power to choke off the Eritrean supply lines—a misreading not only of the EPLF's capacity for self-reliance but the deep pro-Eritrean sentiment in Eastern Sudan, which the government could not override. Hence Mengistu began a strategy of destabilising Sudan. Ethiopia gave shelter to remnants of Anyanya and other dissidents that came its way.

Drawing up the Manifesto

In May 1983, when Battalions 104 and 105 of the Sudanese army mutinied in Bor, Pibor and Ayod, it was natural for them to flee to Ethiopia. The Dergue was already assisting Anyanya II fighters, though it was becoming frustrated by military shortcomings and political incoherence. The newcomers presented a better opportunity: they themselves were determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past. A former Ethiopian official recalled collecting Garang and others from the border.⁵

We took them to Gambela. Then we had a meeting with security from central government and the Vice-President [of Ethiopia]. We asked them to explain their objectives. Then we sent them to Itang and analysed their political consciousness. The standard of their consciousness was better than Anyanya II and the situation of the [Southern Sudanese] people was so desperate as to [make us] actually

⁵ Interviewed by African Rights, June 1996.

act on the matter. We decided: now we have to use these people as the yolk and core of the Movement.

There was a meeting of minds between the Ethiopians and the nascent SPLA leadership. They agreed that the Anyanya had failed to achieve its potential in the first civil war. The Manifesto stated:

The jobbist⁶ character of Anyanya I forms an important experience from which the present Movement (SPLM) has a great deal to learn. During Anyanya I there was a proliferation of Governments and political parties such as SANU, SSLF, Southern Front, Sue Republic, Nile Provisional Government, the State of Anyidi and many others. Each of these 'governments' was complete with its Western-type cabinet. The bourgeoisified Southern Bureaucratic elite of Anyanya I were quite content with these job titles even though most of these titles carried no functions. . . . The SPLA will never allow such fake governments and parties to exist.

Note 'SPLA': it was to be the Army not the Movement that was in ultimate control. The leaders recognised that it was only when the Anyanya had finally achieved centralised military command that it could begin to achieve its aims. That centralised command had come about through Joseph Lagu's control over arms supplied from abroad (Israel via Ethiopia and Uganda).

The 'Manifesto' was also tilted against old-style civilian politicians and the trappings of democracy. It referred to:

Early determination of the correct leadership of the SPLA and SPLM so that the movement is not hi-jacked by counter revolutionaries.

This reflected Southern experience during the Anyanya war, when governments in Khartoum had considerable success in dividing Southern politicians by offering them, as individuals, senior posts or other

⁶ I.e. overly concerned with members' jobs; individualistically self-serving.

inducements. These failings were also reflected in the decade of Southern Regional Government, when Southern politics was again beset by factionalism, personal ambition and manipulation by Khartoum. Many younger Southerners came to believe that the older generation of Southern politicians had failed them—even betrayed them. Better-educated and more radical than their elders, they longed for a new start.

In Sudan in 1983, there was widespread belief that Nimeiri's days were numbered, and that a decisive military blow could be struck that would topple the regime. Hence the SPLA—in common with the civil opposition in the North—did not feel obliged to undertake the slow and painstaking process of mass mobilisation, but instead planned a quick strike. This analysis proved tactically correct—as the events of March–April 1985 showed—but strategically inadequate, in that the fall of Nimeiri did not resolve the basic problems of Sudan.

Given these political circumstances, the nature of the SPLM Manifesto had logic behind it: it was highly centralist, was based on an overall analysis of the nature of the Sudanese state, and put military victory above political organisation. It also converged with the interests of the Ethiopians. By 31 July, eleven weeks after the Bor mutiny, an SPLM Manifesto was in circulation.

The Supremacy of Garang

Dr John Garang was the personification of someone determined to overcome the shortcomings of the past. As a young Anyanya officer in 1972, he had made astute and prophetic criticisms of the Addis Ababa Agreement. By 1983, Garang had been a lecturer at the military academy in Khartoum and a director of research at army headquarters. A colonel, he held the most senior rank among the first rebel leaders who assembled in Itang in mid-1983, although he had less military experience than some of the less senior officers present. Garang was a leading choice as head of the military wing, but he was not named as Chairman of the SPLM. The political leadership of the Movement was divided among the former ministers present: Akuot Atem, Samuel Gai Tut and Joseph Oduho. But

differences over seniority among the leaders resulted in the withdrawal of Akuot Atem and Samuel Gai Tut to join the bulk of their supporters from Anyanya II.

The disagreement was resolved by military means. Garang's forces, under Kerubino Kuanyin, drove the Anyanya II out of Ethiopia, and killed Samuel Gai Tut. John Garang then took the title of Chairman of the SPLM as well as Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA. This marked the ascendancy of the military over the political.

Many threats to the 'correct' running of the liberation movement still existed. Based in Upper Nile, and supplied by the Sudan Government, Anyanya II continued to resist the SPLA until 1987. Another Anyanya II group in Bahr-el-Ghazal, led by Kawac Makuei, was also discontented. Makuei was angry at being denied a high position in the SPLA: Garang had him imprisoned from 1984 to 1992. Lakurnyang Lado, the Chairman of the Front for the Liberation of South Sudan (which captured Boma independently from the SPLA in the early days of the war) was detained and publicly executed after refusing to be absorbed. There are many allegations of other extra-judicial killings.

Southern intellectuals and politicians who wanted to join the SPLM were subordinated to the military. Most were required to become soldiers and thus be ruled by command, before any responsibility was given to them. Then they were given assignments which tested their loyalty. Even then, some of them were arrested and detained without trial.

In the vocabulary of the Manifesto, these were counter-revolutionaries who threatened to take over the Movement, and men who threatened a disunity that would jeopardise the SPLA's ability to forge unified and progressive political force. According to a liberal-democratic view, they were victims of human rights abuses because they challenged autocratic leadership. The shadow of these early violations still hangs over the Movement.

The SPLA and the End of Nimeiri

During the last months of Nimeiri's rule, the SPLA's political analysis had wide appeal in Sudan. The prospect of a unified and powerful force representing not just the South but also the other marginalised areas was something radically new and extremely attractive to a broad spectrum of Sudanese, disillusioned with both Nimeiri's dictatorship and with the corrupt and indecisive 'democratic' politics that had preceded it. Political decay had marked the South after 1972. As well as articulating the first clear radical vision for Sudan for over a decade, the SPLA was also the first genuine threat to Nimeiri's rule for almost a decade: it showed that he was not invulnerable, and gave an enormous boost to the internal opposition.

But the SPLA was not part of a wider Sudanese coalition. Members of existing clandestine political organisations were absorbed as individuals only. There was no broad front: the Movement was resolutely centralist. The SPLA had not decided whether it could achieve the liberation of the country alone or if it needed civilian allies in the North. By leaving this question unanswered, it made only opportunistic and tactical alliances with northern groups, rather than developing a common political strategy. It was caught out by the April 1985 Popular Uprising.

The uprising did not end the war. Nimeiri had disregarded popular opposition, but—as Garang quickly pointed out—the old sectarian families merely took over, with a similar agenda of northern domination. However, the trappings of liberal democracy and the political openings that existed presented a severe challenge to the Movement. Having achieved its stated goal of removing Nimeiri, should the SPLM join the government or not? Garang decided not. This decision was made at the top without widespread consultation. Political discussion within the SPLA was curtailed. The two remaining civilian politicians on the SPLM's original Provisional Executive Committee (PEC)—Joseph Oduho and Martin Majier—were imprisoned from 1985 to 1992. (Majier was later re-imprisoned and died in detention; Oduho consorted with another faction and was killed by the SPLA in a commando strike.) The PEC was turned into a 'Political-Military High Command' (PMHC) composed only of soldiers. Two of the five original members of the

PMHC (Kerubino Kuanyin and Arok Thon) were then incarcerated because they acted independently of Garang.

THE HUMANITARIAN STRATEGIES OF THE SPLA

Military centralism was not the way to maximise a respect for humanitarian values. At the outset, the SPLA had three priorities which governed its attitude to humanitarian relief.

Firstly, it wanted to be able to train soldiers systematically. This was no light matter. The aim was to create an army capable not only of harassing the enemy with guerrilla raids, but of defeating the Sudanese Government forces in conventional engagements. A raw recruit would need a course of at least six months. And in order to build up a force of sufficient size, successive batches of trainees would have to be graduated for several years. Initially the training was applied to men who had already come to join the SPLA in Ethiopia. After them, a stream of new recruits was required. A second requirement was that this process of recruitment had to be managed.

Thirdly, the SPLA needed to supply its soldiers in the field. This was partly a matter of arms and ammunition. There was also a requirement for food, domestic utensils and medical supplies.

These three priorities roughly corresponded to three unwritten relief strategies. First: the international system for relief to refugees was to be exploited in order to sustain people while many of them were undergoing military training in Ethiopia. Second: people were to be discouraged from staying in Government-held areas. (Humanitarian activity was one of the things that kept them there.) Third: if possible, relief was to be mobilised in the SPLA-held areas which would ease the problems of provisioning the rebel soldiers.

Refugees and Trainees

A few Southern Sudanese refugees had been present in Ethiopia before 1983, but no internationally-recognised relief camps had been set up.

From May 1983, the numbers of refugees grew rapidly, and by the end of 1987, four camps had been established. These were related to SPLA bases and training centres.

The main refugee camps and SPLA centres were:

- Itang, situated about 30 k.m. west of Gambela town, and 50 k.m. east of Jekau on the Sudan border. This is where the rebel Sudan army soldiers were first brought, when they crossed to Ethiopia in May/June 1983, and where the SPLM/A was first constituted. An official refugee camp was established there at the same time, in June 1983. It remained the largest of the camps for Sudanese refugees until all the camps were evacuated, in May and June 1991. At that time, the camp population was between 100,000 and 250,000.
- Bilpam, about 40 k.m. south-west of Itang. In May 1983, this was already the base of the Anyanya II guerrillas. Later in the year, the forces of John Garang chased out those who had not been absorbed. Bilpam became the headquarters of the SPLA, and the site of a military training camp.
- Bonga, about 40 k.m. east of Gambela town, is the site of an Ethiopian military training school. This was shared with SPLA. The SPLA managed its own section and was allowed to administer its own internal discipline there on its own authority.
- Zinc training centre, near Gambela Town. This was an Ethiopian training centre for signallers, intelligence work and ideological instruction, shared with the SPLA. It was attached to a barracks. Senior officers of the SPLA would sometimes stay there, for security.
- Dima is about 100 k.m. south-east of Pinyudo and 100 k.m. north-east of Boma. A refugee camp was opened there in August 1986, when the official number of Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia had topped the 100,000 mark.
- Pinyudo (alternatively spelled Panyido, Panydiu, Pignudo or Fugnido) was on the Gilo river, about 100 k.m. south of Gambela town,

and 50 k.m. north-east of the border town of Pochala. A refugee camp was opened there in December 1987, to relieve the pressure on Itang after an influx in the middle of that year.⁷

- Tsore refugee camp was near Asosa town (about 200 k.m. north of Gambela town) in Welega Province. It was opened in May 1987 and housed mainly Uduk people. The camp population had reached about 40,000 by the end of 1989, when Tsore was attacked and destroyed by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The people set out on a long flight down the Sudan-Ethiopia border to Itang. The camp was not re-opened.
- Boma base. Inside Southern Sudan, Boma became the main centre for the SPLA. It is situated in hills near the Ethiopian border.

Relief commodities officially destined for Itang served also the SPLA training centres and headquarters at Bonga and Bilpam. When Dima camp opened, it became a source of supply for the base at Boma. Tsore was a depot for the SPLA units in Blue Nile and Welega Province, where the Ethiopian Government was using them to fight the OLF (which was being supplied from Sudan).

Between 1983 and 1991, almost all the SPLA's regular troops—roughly 110,000 men and boys⁸—were trained using these centres. This included training of trainers, of senior officers, of radio operators, of intelligence personnel and other specialists. The SPLA was essentially created in these places.

A senior SPLA officer later told African Rights⁹ that the trainees had been entirely dependent on relief food from the camps. This is not strictly accurate—the soldiers also fed themselves with food from the

⁷ Radda Barnen, 'The Unaccompanied Minors of Southern Sudan', 1994.

⁸ A rough figure. A former official of the Dergue estimated that Ethiopia had provided for the training and full equipment of 120,000 soldiers. In fact many of the supplies came originally from Soviet bloc countries and Libya. The Sudan Armed Forces numbered about 75,000 by 1991, augmented by a rapidly growing PDF.

⁹ Interviewed in November 1995.

local populations—but certainly a large proportion of their consumption was food aid. Sudanese who were in Itang during that period later reported that they routinely saw trucks being re-loaded with food at the camp stores; at times on a daily basis. Often they were just going to the nearby training camps, but relief supplies were also sometimes sold, or used on military operations in Eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile. The SPLA 'taxed' the supplies for the refugees, reselling substantial amounts of food on the market and earning millions of Ethiopian Birr. This income bypassed the SPLA's formal structure—the Committee for Organising Production and Services (COPS)¹⁰—and was used to purchase vehicles and other equipment for the SPLA.

The label of 'refugees' was also helpful to the SPLA. It was a shorthand that allowed diplomats and relief agencies to think that they understood the situation: the 'refugees' were victims of war and famine, needing help. Many were victims. But the international refugee relief system helped meet the rebels' needs for training and operational bases in territory safe from attack by the Sudan Government. This was the refugee camps' prime rationale. But there were also side effects, which had important implications for Southern Sudanese society.

Relief Provision in the Refugee Camps

Most of the refugees were civilians, not military trainees. Some of the others were soldiers' relatives, many came to Ethiopia because of the depredations of Sudan Government militias, disruptions caused by the SPLA attacks, and the general breakdown of law, order, economic opportunities and public services. The refugee camps became a safety-net. Meanwhile, in the camps, the SPLA had its first opportunity to establish social control over a large group of Southern civilians. The camps became a model for an SPLA-dominated society.

¹⁰ The Economic Commission of COPS had established trading companies for exports to Uganda and Kenya, but by 1990 it was defunct.

In refugee camps, authority is normally divided between the host government, the refugees' own political organisations, and the relief agencies (which control vital resources). In this case, the Ethiopian Government ceded its authority to the SPLA command. The SPLA imposed a security system on the camps, with curfews, controls on people's movements and economic activities, and summary punishments. Exceptionally, it allowed the SPLA to remain fully *militarised* in the camps and surrounding areas.

The Ethiopians also marginalised international agencies, by restricting their access and monitoring. Formally, UNHCR had joint responsibility alongside the government. The Ethiopian government insisted that the actual management of work in the camps be done by its own employees.¹¹ The UNHCR staff who worked in the camp were also Ethiopian nationals, whose appointments had been approved by the Government. They were in no position to challenge government actions: their job was in essence about handing food over to the SPLA, and making reports which were acceptable to UNHCR in Addis Ababa and to the international donors.

As a result, unchallenged authority in the camps was held by the SPLA. The SPLA was not only free to divert relief material to its military training camps and operational units, but also controlled the civilians' access to basic necessities. This reversed the relationship advocated by Mao Zedong, whereby revolutionary fighters rely on civilians for *their* necessities. There was little incentive for soldiers to develop any sense of respect for civilians, or any forms of accountability outside the command structure of the army.

Ethiopian exclusion of foreign aid workers meant that the huge refugee programmes were implemented with almost no assessment or monitoring. When relief workers or donors visited the camps, it was by appointment and under tight government (and, more discreetly, SPLA) control. Former camp residents described how a visit would be prepared

¹¹ These were initially from the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and later from the Administration for Refugee Affairs.

in advance. Weapons and other obvious signs of military presence would be hidden. Signs of relative prosperity—such as expensive clothing—would also be concealed. Sometimes a few refugees would be specially instructed to wear sack-cloth. No refugee was allowed to talk to a foreigner except in the presence of a fairly senior SPLA official. Then the conversation would be through a translator, who could distort and censor what was said.¹²

This was only an extreme example of how the Ethiopian Government treated humanitarian issues as security concerns, and manipulated all relief programmes to its political and military advantage.

But the donors persistently asked questions, and in February 1991, a high-level Multi-Donor Technical Mission (MDTM) finally visited the camps. In 1990, the refugee camps had received more than 75,000 metric tonnes in food aid—enough for a full ration to well over 400,000 people. The MDTM was aware that it was not getting at the truth, and diplomatically said so:

To what extent the Sudan People's Liberation Army has a hand in influencing the processes of integration and societal changes in the camps, was difficult to ascertain in such a short trip. Due to the carefully orchestrated nature of the visit it was hard to gain candid comments. It is well known in the area that the SPLA has a strong presence in the border regions. It is also well known that many of the refugees are equally attempting to seek sanctuary from involvement and conscription by the SPLA as well as getting away from the activities of the Sudanese army. There was no way of reaching and discovering the many layers of tensions and complexities that we believe must exist here. To the team the refugees presented a united 'neutral' front. Senior leaders denied the existence of the SPLA in the area going as far to remark 'we only know of John Garang through the BBC'.¹³

¹² The point here is not to deny that real need and suffering existed in the camp at various times, but to illustrate the ways in which information was controlled.

¹³ Multi-Donor Technical Mission, 'Report on Mission to Western Region Sudanese Refugee Camps,' February 1991.

This mission was the major donor assessment of Itang, a full eight years after its establishment. It comprised senior members of donor agencies, including two ambassadors. But the team expressed its hopelessness in trying to understand how its aid was being used. It had its suspicions, but felt powerless to investigate them effectively. The donors had found themselves with the form of accountability but not the substance.

One of the donors' major concerns was the actual numbers of refugees present. One of the SPLA's main interests was to inflate the numbers so as to attract more aid. The MDTM noted:

There is no system in place for review of population figures which are given as cumulative since the establishment of the camps. The Mission was informed that UNFPA has been requested to devise a census of the population, but no date and no method has been fixed as yet. The Mission doubts that the refugee population in the three camps is as large as is being presented.¹⁴

The donors' response in this situation (as in many others) was to accept the inflated population figures, but often to fail to deliver the full quota of supplies. The UNHCR planning figures at the time were 280,000 people in Itang alone and over 400,000 total. In May, after the return of the refugees to Sudan, estimates were retrospectively revised down to about 270,000 total.¹⁵

Was enough relief provided? It is impossible to tell. At times, aid agencies identified signs of undernutrition in the camps, but these may have been due to crises of influx, badly-timed deliveries, and large diversions by the SPLA. We simply cannot tell if people died or suffered because of inadequate relief, poor organisation, or SPLA appropriation. What can be investigated are wider social effects of the camps.

¹⁴ MDTM *ibid.*

¹⁵ Alastair Scott-Villiers, Patta Scott-Villiers and Cole P. Dodge, 'Repatriation of 150,000 Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia: The Manipulation of Civilians in a Situation of Conflict,' *Disasters* 17, 1993, 202-17.

Trade and its Implications

Much relief food was sold in Ethiopia: traded for cash, clothing, cattle and other items. By 1990, the Itang Camp manager was even managing to raise enough revenue to buy vehicles for the SPLA, and was publicly commended by John Garang for doing so. At the same time, it was common for SPLA soldiers to gain cattle and other commodities by extortion and looting from the local Anuak and Gaajak Nuer.

For much of the time, in accordance with Ethiopian policy, the SPLA restricted private trade. Individuals were forbidden to engage in anything except small-scale local commerce. This had the rationale of stopping intelligence passing to the enemy or foreigners, and of preventing the growth of a bourgeois sector. This placed the trade monopoly in the hands of the SPLA itself, and those officers who could bend the rules. Allegations have been made against specific officers and ethnic groups. In March 1989, when a meeting was held to resolve many complaints by local Ethiopians against SPLA lawlessness in the border region, unauthorised trading by SPLA commanders was one item of contention.

In 1990, Ethiopian policy on domestic trade was liberalised. SPLA policy in the adjoining region also changed: some attribute the loosening up to the posting of Riek Machar as the main commander in western Upper Nile, others to the SPLA's consolidation of most of the east bank of the Nile in 1989. Of all the SPLA economic initiatives, this was the most systematic and sustained. It involved a truce with the Misiriya and opening up of markets for North-South trade, encouraging businessmen to trade with garrison towns, and a friendly attitude towards foreign relief agencies. By 1991, refugee relief was a large component of a widespread trade revival in Upper Nile.

Itang camp became a centre for commercial activity. During the dry season the people of the Sobat and Pibor rivers came to Itang with their cattle and canoes, sold their cattle for Ethiopian currency, bought food in large quantities (larger than could be carried overland), and brought it back by canoe to their homes in the Sudan. Small markets grew up

inside the Sudan, especially at Jokau and Nasir, where goods from Ethiopia and Itang were sold for Ethiopian and Sudanese currency. Relief supplies from Itang were dispersed over a wide geographical area through kinship networks which straddled the international border.¹⁶

Commerce was good for the economy of Upper Nile, and for the food security of its inhabitants. However, in Itang, the main beneficiaries remained those who controlled the allocations of relief. The SPLA was acquiring some of the characteristics of a centralised state, allocating the resources it controlled for its own policy ends, while certain individuals extracted benefits from their positions.

Social Change among the Refugees

Exile is an important experience. Depending on circumstances and leadership, it can radicalise people or depoliticise them; it can make them more assertive or more obedient. In the 1960s, many Southerners in exile in Uganda had acquired a good education and returned to Sudan with high career aspirations; in the 1970s Ansar exiles had nurtured their neo-Mahdist ideology and plotted an armed return. The unique conditions in the Gambela refugee camps had their own implications. Normal family life was rare: more than ninety per cent of the refugees were boys and men (while a majority of the Southerners displaced to the North were female). The MDTM noted:

It is obvious that this is a period of great social change and transition for the Southern Sudanese in these camps. Different ethnic groups are now living closely together cultural norms and traditions are changing and new skills and innovations are being developed and implemented. The implications of all this are not lost on the refugees who are very

¹⁶ Douglas H. Johnson, 'Increasing the Trauma of Return: An Assessment of the UN's Emergency Response to the Evacuation of the Sudanese Refugee Camps in Ethiopia, 1991,' mimeographed paper, 31 October 1992.

aware that once they return to Sudan they will have to start from zero to rebuild their societies. There is a strong feeling that the reshaping of society here, in a way is making them into an 'avant garde' group.¹⁷

In fact, many of the real social and political implications of exile are not apparent at the time: refugee camps are an artificial environment in which myths and hopes may appear as realities, while many latent allegiances and aspirations are not evident—there is never a reduction to complete 'zero'. Many of the former refugees have indeed become a vanguard of social change in Southern Sudan, but not always in the ways anticipated.

One of the most significant social changes was the spread of church affiliation. Several Christian groups were active in the camps in Ethiopia, some with small-scale aid projects, while relief sacks bore the marks of agencies such as Catholic Relief Services. Many of the refugees had come to Ethiopia seeking an education. With many of the traditional restraints on culture-change missing, Christianity was easier to accept. Many converts were won. When the refugees returned to Sudan they provided an impetus for the dramatic increase in church membership which happened during the war. This boom was especially notable after the SPLA gave clergymen greater freedom to work in 1989. That year saw the beginnings of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), one of whose important origins was a committee in Itang, set up to attract aid resources for the indigenous Sudanese church organisations.¹⁸

In 1991, when the camps were disbanded, many new Christians returned to Sudan and founded churches where none had existed before. Perhaps as many as sixty Roman Catholic congregations had appeared by late 1994 in areas of Upper Nile where previously the only Christians had been Presbyterians. This posed a problem for the Catholic authorities, who were almost completely unable to provide trained priests or lay workers, and thus ensure that orthodox doctrines were being followed. The Protestant churches, also, have been, faced with grave

¹⁷ MDTM *ibid.*

¹⁸ Interviews with Church leaders, January and July 1995.

questions about the nature and sustainability of the Christianity that has been propagated.¹⁹

In the camps, church groups were usually active in the field of education—a traditional focus of missionaries. By the late 1980s, Southern boys had very few alternatives for obtaining an education. There were no schools in the SPLA-controlled areas of the South, but in the camps, rates of school enrolment were much higher than they had been in most parts of Southern Sudan before the war.²⁰ Church membership and education became virtually inseparable.

Since the evacuation of the camps in 1991, education provision has improved in SPLA-held Sudan, though it is still tiny compared to need. Aid agencies have begun supporting institutions inside the country, but there are acute problems in obtaining teachers of commitment and quality, in organising curricula and examinations, in escaping insecurity, in receiving and holding on to the necessary supplies and equipment. In 1995 only four secondary schools existed in the SPLA areas, all of them in Western Equatoria. Becoming a refugee has remained the best choice for many young people wanting an education: there are better chances of schools in Uganda and Kenya, and the more ambitious strive for sponsorships outside north-east Africa.

The effects of the refugee bias in education have yet to be fully seen. It may well widen the gap between the elites and the poor in Southern Sudan, and increase the tendency for the better-educated people to be resettled eventually in industrialised countries.

Many of the children who came to the camps in Ethiopia did so without a responsible adult from the family. The great majority of these were boys. They became known among humanitarian agencies as 'the unaccompanied minors'. There has been controversy about the reasons for their arrival, and the extent and nature of their exploitation by the SPLA. The SPLA has said they came because of the desire for education

¹⁹ See African Rights, 'Great Expectations: The Civil Roles of the Churches in Southern Sudan,' Discussion Paper No 6, April 1995.

²⁰ MDTM *ibid.*

and the need to flee from enemy raiding. Human rights and humanitarian organisations have compiled sufficient evidence that many of them were deliberately recruited from villages, marched to Ethiopia, given military training, and even deployed in battles.²¹ The refugee camps certainly acted as a magnet for boys, many of whom wanted to be armed and trained, as well as educated. This combined neatly with the SPLA's early policy of developing youth cadres. Many of the unaccompanied minors went on to die or suffer extremes of hunger and other privation. As with the refugee phenomenon in general, the final impact on Southern Sudanese society has yet to be assessed. But there are fears that many of the survivors, having grown up without the normal socialising experiences of family and community, will add to the instability of Sudanese society.

Recruitment and the Military Ethos

The priority of the SPLA was to build a strong army. The emphasis was on numbers. Particularly in the early years, many recruits were driven by personal experience of exploitation or discrimination. Often these young men (and a few young women) had a specific desire to reclaim their land or 'drive out the Arabs.' Others joined up, inspired by solidarity and the noble cause of fighting for liberation. Some were defecting army units or locally-mobilised self-defence or militia groups, wanting to join the struggle. One of the problems for the SPLA was that it was unable to offer an immediate, tangible realisation of these recruits' aspirations: social liberation would have to wait until the war was won. In the meantime, the bonds of solidarity that grow among fellow fighters could not serve indefinitely.

The SPLA was not organised as a liberation movement, merging with the people and carrying out social reform. It was organised as a hierarchical army, broadly on the model of its opponent. But it did not provide a formal system of wages for its soldiers. The SPLA told its

²¹ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Children of Sudan*, 1995.

recruits that, as guerrillas, they needed to be very tough and self-reliant; they would have to fend for themselves. The message to graduating soldiers was:

You must live through the barrels of your guns. Food, wife and property wherever you find them are to be acquired through your might.²²

All military training is, in a sense, dehumanising. It prepares people to kill others. But the SPLA took this to an extreme. It inculcated a callous attitude towards civilians, not only in order to help its fighters to survive, but to spread the idea that the only option for a self-respecting man was to join up.

[Military training] changed a human being's mind. Untrained people seemed inferior. 'Civilian' became an insult. 'You don't know what people are doing' [a common phrase to dismiss someone as incapable] meant you don't know what the soldiers are doing.²³

At times, the elevation of the military verged on a nihilistic attitude towards civilians and existing social structures. Many cases of abuse by SPLA soldiers against civilians have been documented.²⁴ The list includes extortion, destruction of assets, looting, murder, abduction, forced labour and rape. Of course atrocities happen in many wars. But

²² Variants on this theme are commonly recounted now by former trainees including some who still belong to the SPLM. This particular wording is quoted from a tract by a group of former political detainees: 'For a Strong SPLM/A: What is to be Done?' (Amon Mon Wantok and others, 11 June 1992).

²³ Former SPLA soldier, interviewed in April 1996.

²⁴ Collections and summaries are included in, for instance: Amnesty International (1989) 'Sudan: Human Rights Violations in the Context of Civil War'; Africa Watch (1990) 'Sudan: Denying the Honour of Living'; Human Rights Watch/Africa (1994) 'Sudan: Civilian Devastation'; Human Rights Watch/Africa (1996), 'Behind the Red Line: Political Repression in Sudan.'

from the beginning, the SPLA failed to show a determination to eliminate such actions. True, they were included as offences in the 1984 SPLA Disciplinary Code, but implementation of the code was always haphazard. Usually it depended on the attitude of the local commander, and while some were strict and respectful of the law, too often others were tolerant or complicit in the crime.

Before 1995, the only documented cases of the SPLA High Command punishing serving officers on the grounds of offences against civilians occurred in Ethiopia. The regional authorities in Gambela delivered stern warnings about the SPLA's failure to stop its soldiers abusing the local people.²⁵ After the killing of over twenty Ethiopians and the burning of the houses of many more in September 1989, 25 SPLA soldiers were arrested and four executed.

This was exceptional. Southern Sudanese civilians were not so fortunate. This can be attributed partly to the fact that soldiers had been told to fend for themselves in the first place. The High Command was prepared to forgo disciplinary control in order to maintain a basic level of loyalty.

As the war progressed, ethnically-driven mobilisation persisted and even increased. John Garang is probably sincere in saying that he did not want to create a tribally-divisive army. But the dynamics of recruitment, training and provisioning made it hard for him to avoid doing so. Recruits came to Ethiopia in ethnically-homogenous groups, and were enrolled in the same manner. An ethnically-driven mobilisation was also forced upon the SPLA by the divisive strategies pursued by the government, and the ethnic labels carelessly or deliberately used by some Southern intellectuals in Khartoum. While the leadership disavowed tribalism, SPLA units in the field often pursued ethnically-specific agendas. For example they took the side of the Bor Dinka in dispute with the Murle (who were armed by the government) in 1983-4 and the side of the Shilluk against the Nuer-dominated Anyanya II in 1985-6.

²⁵ 'The Joint Declaration made by the Gambella Adm. Region and the SPLA to Improve the Relations Prevailing Between the Ethiopian Masses and the SPLA,' 27 March 1989, points 1.5-1.10; 'Nekempte Declaration', September 1989.

The SPLA's use of land mines reflects the same ethos. As might be expected, the Sudanese army, as an occupation force in much of the South, has made wide and indiscriminate use of land mines, causing many civilian casualties. The SPLA, claiming to represent the people, might be expected to be more restrained in its mine warfare—the inhabitants of the South will have to live with mines for years, perhaps decades, after the end of the war, when they will continue to cause loss of life and limb and keep roads, fields and pastures out of use. In 1985, when the SPLA first received land mines from the Ethiopians, one senior commander suggested keeping careful maps of where mines were laid. His advice was not followed, and the locations of mines are known only to those who laid them—and many have since died or have forgotten where they were placed. Both sides are continuing to use mines to this day.

In summary, despite the aspirations of its political agenda, and the personal motives and qualities of very many of its officers and rank-and-file, the SPLA was not set up to be 'the fighting vanguard of the people' as envisaged by Che Guevara²⁶ and other practitioners of revolutionary warfare. It was established as a conventional military force, aiming to seize power. When it failed to do that, it lost its way.

The SPLA's Blockade on Relief

[The] garrison towns in the South are famine-stricken and are real disaster areas, and this is good; our military strategy is working.²⁷

Like other guerrilla armies, the SPLA counted on moving through rural areas to cut government supply lines and overrun small garrisons. By 1986, it was making travel and transportation very difficult to many major towns, by means of landmines, ambushes, shooting at barges and

²⁶ Che Guevara, *Che Guevara Speaks*, London, Pathfinder Books, 1967, p. 75.

²⁷ John Garang, in Mansour Khalid (ed.), *John Garang Speaks*, London 1987, p. 71.

aircraft, and damaging the Lol bridge on the single rail link to the South. At the same time, military activity had meant that many of these towns now contained populations displaced from the surrounding countryside. Officially, the SPLA wanted these people to go out from the towns, so that they could join the struggle, and leave the government forces in an exposed position. But this did not often happen, due largely to fear of both the SPLA and government forces. In addition, while the SPLA often called upon civilians to leave the towns, it rarely provided safe passage through the battle lines, and still more rarely did it provide any sustenance to those who arrived in the 'liberated' area.

The siege tactics cut normal urban-rural links. Before the war, large parts of rural Southern Sudan were dependent on regular interaction with towns for economic survival. Rural people sold cattle, fish and produce in towns, and many depended on seasonal labour, in order to buy grain and consumer goods such as salt, soap and clothes. As these links withered, economic life in the villages stagnated.

The combination of siege and swollen populations began to create severe shortages of food and other commodities in the government-held towns. Humanitarian agencies responded by trying to arrange special access for relief supplies. In response, the SPLA took a hard line on relief. In February 1986 it refused a specific request from the UN to allow relief trucks access to Juba. Four months later, it turned down the idea of a 'food truce' put forward by a consortium of NGOs. And on 16 August, two days after the ICRC had started airlifting supplies to Wau, it shot down an airliner near Malakal, killing sixty people and also putting an end to the Red Cross operation. 'We are not repentant' said John Garang, 'We warned that the airspace over War Zone I is closed.'²⁸

The SPLA defended this policy publicly by alleging that relief operations had been abused in order to assist Khartoum's military activities. It claimed that a 1985 relief convoy to Shambe and Yirol by barge and truck had provisioned the garrison in Yirol. Supplies destined

²⁸ Blaine Harden, 'Sudan Rebel Leader "Not Repentant" Despite Famine, Downing of Aircraft,' *International Herald Tribune*, 19 September 1986.

for Lakes Province in September had been commandeered by the Military Governor in Juba. A UN-flagged barge convoy to Malakal in February 1986 had carried equipment and food for the army. One NGO's vehicles and fuel had been used for military purposes in Eastern Equatoria.²⁹ Some of these allegations were true, though they were made to justify a harsh policy that was causing many Southern civilians to suffer.

These policies remained essentially unchanged until 1989. Interviewed by Arop Madut, Dr John Garang admitted that he was blocking food supplies, and responded to the proposal of allowing free passage: 'that would be a very simplistic way of dealing with a rather complex situation.'³⁰ He argued again that relief agencies working in the North were subject to governmental manipulation, and that food destined for displaced Southerners was being stolen by traders and the army.

Humanitarianism in SPLA Areas

In its early years, the SPLA helped create famine and did very little to relieve it. One of its most serious omissions was the neglect of protecting civilian populations at risk of raiding by militias. As the following chapter documents, massive and repeated raiding by pro-government militias during the years 1985-8 was the prime cause of the disastrous famine in Bahr el Ghazal, and to a slightly lesser extent Upper Nile. These raids were foreseeable and were indeed foreseen. As early as 1984, when the SPLA recruited 10,000 soldiers in Bahr el Ghazal, large-scale assaults were expected. A relatively modest force of trained soldiers could have protected the thickly-populated areas of northern Bahr el Ghazal from the militias' onslaught. It was requested but not sent.³¹ SPLA forces moving through Upper Nile also refused to engage with

²⁹ SPLA/SPLM Newsletter, 1 August 1986.

³⁰ *Sudan Times*, 29 November 1988.

³¹ The SPLA force that first arrived in the area in 1985 was locally known as 'the human locusts'.

militias attacking defenceless villagers, on the grounds that they had not been ordered to do so. When the SPLA besieged garrison towns, it did not help civilians to escape, or provide escapees with assistance.

The second major omission was to organise an effective structure for delivering services. By 1986, the SPLA could also claim that a large proportion of the needy people in Southern Sudan lived in its territory. A communiqué stridently asserted that 95% of the population in Southern Sudan was under rebel administration, and that any relief must be allocated accordingly.³² The stated figure of 95% was a huge exaggeration; but it made a point that was hard to ignore.

Once again, there was a gap between stating the justice of the case and making realistic proposals to solve the problem. The Sudan Government was determined to maintain its sovereignty, and not cede legitimacy to any cross-border assistance to rebel-held territory. Even more importantly, the *Ethiopian* Government agreed: it was determined not to cede the precedent of such an operation, for fear of legitimising the operations into rebel-held Eritrea and Tigray. The SPLA was in a trap. Its solution was to ask for assistance delivered outside Southern Sudan, some of which could be taken inside by the SPLA itself. In March 1984, Col. Garang wrote to several agencies, telling them that the SPLA was not anti-Western, and that its overseas representatives would 'receive any non-military material assistance that you may offer to the SPLA/SPLM and to the South Sudanese Refugees.'³³ (No assistance for civilians *inside* Southern Sudan was requested.) The agencies did not respond. In March the SPLA was contacted by a representative of BandAid to discuss the possibility of setting up a programme in its areas, but no agreement was reached.

In November 1984 an agency was formed with an express mandate to obtain and deliver supplies: the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA). In its registered constitution, the SRRA first took

³² 'The SPLM/SPLA's Position on the Relief Situation in Sudan', 26 August 1986.

³³ Letter to various agencies from John Garang, SPLA, 15 March 1984.

the form of an association of refugees, deriving its authority from the Refugees' Council based at Itang. When the SRRA became more active in 1986-7, it became clear that the senior officers of the organisation were chosen directly by the High Command. Assertions that SRRA was independent were enough to get it registered as an NGO in Kenya, but did not succeed in convincing anyone.

This fact need not, in itself, have been an insurmountable obstacle to external aid. In fact, in different circumstances it could have helped. ERA and REST were also tied to their respective guerrilla armies. But those organisations each took a place within a liberation economy founded on the promotion of local democracy and development, that attracted solidarity and support from certain western humanitarian agencies which admired the Eritrean and Tigrayan struggles. Being attached to the SPLA was no advantage for the SRRA. Early experiments by NGOs in giving funds or supplies to SRRA showed that it could not account for the assistance. BandAid, Oxfam and SCF provided some support to test its capacity and willingness, but it failed the test. In the words of one of the foreign donors involved, the SRRA headquarters staff 'just ate it. . . . By that casual act of peculation they set back [the cause of their people] for years.'³⁴ Its reports and monitoring were not credible, and foreign aid workers came to believe that it could not implement its stated programmes.³⁵

Some of the people who worked for SRRA were intelligent, hard-working and sincere. But the agency suffered from the absence of a strong mandate or genuine humanitarian strategy within the Movement as a whole. Civilian work had little place within the SPLA; local commanders would see the job of an SRRA official as being about the administration of supplies, not community work. Any attempts to build a grassroots organisation or generate extra discussion about social conditions would have been treated with suspicion and hostility. In fact

³⁴ Interviewed in August 1995.

³⁵ Such perceptions are recorded in notes on an informal opinion-gathering exercise among UK NGOs by Anthony Ratter, a consultant working with SRRA, when he visited Britain in October/November 1988.

the SRRA officials were all named from amongst the soldiers anyway and retained their military rank. They received no salary and usually no instructions from the head office. Without supplies, they had nothing to do except other military duties. If aid did materialise, the first human needs to be served would naturally tend to be those close to the army.

How far the SRRA was purposely designed for provisioning fighters is open to debate. At the time, the SPLA was already meeting its material needs 'at source' and an organisation like the SRRA would have been superfluous. Like many institutions set up by the SPLA, it might not have been thoroughly discussed by the leadership, and so it could have been adopted without a practical strategy so that it served an array of miscellaneous ends.

Meanwhile, the SPLA was prepared to bargain tough. It maintained its opposition to relief in government-held areas except as part of some deal by which a greater—or at least comparable—quantity would be delivered in rebel territory. In late 1986, some United Nations agencies tried to appease it with a smaller amount to be sent as part of 'Operation Rainbow' (see chapter 5). The SPLA rejected the offers that were made through secret contacts. The UN went ahead and announced the operation anyway. The SPLA promptly called its bluff, by declaring that airspace in Southern Sudan would remain closed, contributing to the failure of the initiative.

Although by 1986 the SPLA could claim to hold a lot of territory, not much of it was suitable for relief access. Either the place was dangerous or the route was very difficult. The area of greatest need was northern Bahr el Ghazal, roughly 1,000 k.m. from the Kenyan border overland, even by routes passable in peacetime. The small consortium led by BandAid gave £20,000 to SRRA to take relief there, but never received evidence that anything was delivered. Until 1989, almost the only externally verifiable aid activities took place around Narus, just 30 k.m. from Kenya. (Ironically this was in an area where at the time the SPLA had extremely poor relations with the local population; the greatest relief needs were caused by its own fighting against the Toposa.) Church-related organisations would sometimes transport relief to the

border where it was handed over to the SRRA to be carried on army lorries. The Médecins Sans Frontières agencies started small programmes. In 1988, UNICEF did the same, though this stopped immediately when the Sudan Government objected.

A different approach was taken by Norwegian Peoples' Aid (NPA), an approach very much determined by a single individual, Egil Hagen. Hagen was a former soldier who came to identify himself closely with the SPLA. Having worked for NPA previously in Lebanon, he persuaded the organisation to back him in creating a Southern Sudan programme. He worked not with the SRRA, but directly with the army, a fact which encouraged rumours that he was deliberately providing military assistance under the cover of humanitarianism. The more dramatic rumours—about supplying guns and ammunition—have never been substantiated. NPA often took food near to the war front. Most likely, Hagen was motivated by political solidarity and personal empathy with some of the SPLA leaders, and liked dealing with military men who had the power to make local decisions and stick to them. Hagen was afflicted by cancer, and died in 1991.

These relief initiatives were all small, late and far from the areas of greatest need. Most importantly, they were an afterthought in the SPLA's military and political strategy. The most telling verdict on the SPLA's humanitarianism comes from the fact that hundreds of thousands of Southern civilians preferred the trek north, into the heartland of the northern militias, to trying to survive in areas controlled by the SPLA. The story is much more complicated than the 'northern hospitality and SPLA abuses' repeatedly cited by the Sudan Government, but the simple fact remains that huge numbers of Southerners fled from their supposed liberators. The SPLA's failure to provide for them was not only an abuse, it was a blunder, as large areas of the South were deprived of the 'water' on which the rebel 'fish' depended, and many of the displaced subsequently returned to the warfront, conscripted by the Sudan armed forces and militias.

Disabled Veterans and Families of the War Dead

One of the Sudan Government's major humanitarian initiatives is to provide for the families of 'martyrs'. The SPLA, in common with other liberation struggles, also speaks of its 'martyrs', but unlike them, its provision for their material needs is modest and haphazard. In the Nuba Mountains, some widows and orphans have been cared for and there have been attempts to put this welfare duty on a more systematic basis. (Captain Miriam Yohana was placed in charge of their welfare.) Elsewhere, most widows and orphans have had to rely on the goodwill and generosity of relatives or have fended for themselves. There is a similar story for those left physically disabled by the fighting. Very few are given non-combatant positions where they can still make a useful contribution despite their handicap. Many disabled veterans remain bitter at their neglect. Their plight was recognised at the SPLM Convention of March-April 1994, which resolved to create 'A department for wounded heroes and families of martyrs,'³⁶ but nothing has been set up at the time of writing.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first years of the war, the SPLA took a very hard view of relief: it was something to be manipulated as an immediate tool for fighting the war, and not allowed to get in the way of that purpose. International relief agencies failed to mount an effective opposition to this policy. The SPLA attitude of non-humanitarianism—like the fact of war itself—caused a great many deaths and a great deal of suffering; but such a stance can be explained by the origins and early priorities of the rebellion. The SPLA failed to win a quick victory, and later its circumstances changed. The relief policy had to be softened and in many ways reversed, as will be seen in the following chapters.

³⁶ SPLM/SPLA First National Convention, 'Resolutions, Appointments and Protocol,' March/April 1994, Article 14.1.5.

The position taken by the SPLA also had important implications for the failure of the anti-famine coalition to re-emerge in Sudanese national politics. In the last months of Nimeiri, the SPLA radio broadcasts denouncing the Government for ignoring the famine had helped mobilise civil resistance in Khartoum and other cities. After the Popular Uprising, the SPLA radio fell silent on this issue—because the SPLA was itself guilty of the same crime. Progressive and Southern forces in Khartoum tried to push the Government to respond to the human crisis in the South, but they were unable to make any sort of alliance with the most powerful Southern force—the SPLA—and their efforts failed.

The authoritarianism of the SPLA also has implications for the central contention of this book: that external aid abets authoritarian tendencies. It is hard to see how the SPLA could have become *more* authoritarian than it was in the 1980s. What happened when the centralist and authoritarian SPLA began large-scale dealings with international relief agencies will be discussed in later chapters.