

# Opposition wants IMF program for Nigeria

by Lydia Cherry

Multi-millionaire Nigerian business tycoon Moshood Abiola is now in hiding in Nigeria, after he announced on June 12 that he would head an alternative government, and urged that the international community withdraw recognition from the military government of Gen. Sani Abacha. By throwing in his lot with the International Monetary Fund, Abiola has cleared up any remaining questions about what his "democratic" government would actually mean: Both he and his representatives in the United States made clear the first week in June that an Abiola government would mean full rapprochement with the IMF.

## Abacha measures would be reversed

Speaking in Lagos on June 9, Abiola pledged that his regime will immediately scrap the economic controls that head of state Abacha put into effect early this year in an attempt to rescue the country from the effects of seven years of IMF structural adjustment programs. "There can be little meaningful economic growth if the economy is run through commands issued by those better suited to the battleground," Abiola said in Lagos, Reuters reported. Reuters made clear that Abiola has now "pledged to reverse the Abacha measures which had marked a major retreat from seven years of International Monetary Fund-backed free market reforms."

Responding to a question whether the IMF and World Bank are supportive of Abiola's proposed economic program, at the National Press Club in Washington on June 13, an official spokesman for Abiola claimed: "We have the program, and this program is something that the United States will feel comfortable with. . . . We believe that, by and large, [Abiola's] economic program will be something that those two bodies [IMF and World Bank] would want to try."

In an announcement that sent tremors throughout the world of Anglo-American finance in early January, General Abacha pointed out that "the military still remains the only institution in the position to put an end to the drift toward total collapse," and announced that the days of applying IMF structural adjustment programs to the Nigerian economy were over. He announced decrees fixing interest and currency exchange rates, imposing controls on foreign exchange trading and imports, and, most important, providing that 60% of all bank credits will be directed to agricultural and manufacturing enterprises.

The western-linked "Project Democracy" apparatus

within Nigeria, in the United States, and in London had pledged to go ahead with demonstrations and strikes beginning over the weekend of June 11-12 to force the Abacha government to step down, but this action subsided after the first day. June 12 was the one-year anniversary of an election stopped in mid-stream because of "irregularities." Abiola insists that he would have won this election, and has been campaigning in Washington and London for these two governments to assist him in securing power.

## The danger of civil war

Members of the Nigerian military and civilian elite appear to be keenly aware that, without real economic development, there are fissures within the country that could again, as they have in the past, lead to civil war. However, many Nigerians in the West, particularly those who left Nigeria during the 1980s when the military government of General Babangida imposed the IMF prescription that nearly brought the country to its knees, are now caught up in the worst of the United Nations blather of "democracy" at all costs. At the National Press Club gathering, which was sponsored by various interlocking Nigerian non-governmental organizations, none of the spokesmen seemed to have any notion that democracy in a decaying economy is meaningless.

Instead, people such as former U.S. congressional staffer Randall Echols, Abiola's official representative in the United States, and E.C. Ejiogu of the Nigerian Democratic Awareness Committee, touted their connections with people in high places within the Anglo-American power structure. This included the announcement by Echols that on that same day, British Conservative Member of Parliament Alan Duncan had introduced into the House of Commons a motion supporting Abiola's claim to office, which, Echols said, "calls for General Abacha to step down immediately," and "urges individual governments and the United Nations to support Chief Moshood Abiola in his legitimate claim to the office to which the people of Nigeria have elected him." Echols was furious that the western press had not reported his claim that Abiola's swearing-in ceremony on June 12 had been attended "by more than 10,000 Nigerians." Anyone who doesn't believe this could contact the British Broadcasting Corp., because "BBC reporters were there," he told the press. (Showing lousy coordination, if nothing else, Reuters, which for weeks has been seemingly regurgitating every word the Nigerian democracy crowd has been saying, let slip that no reporters were present at the swearing-in ceremony.)

Ejiogu focused on the upcoming "social explosion" coming in Nigeria unless the military relinquishes power. "All around the borders of Nigeria, people are arming for the upcoming battle with the military," he said. He insisted that large supplies of military equipment were coming into the border areas. Without immediate international recognition for the Abiola government, Nigeria will become "another Rwanda," he promised.