

## IN MEMORIAM

### KEN SARO-WIWA

In an issue of *PRAVADA* about a year ago - Nos.8 and 9 of Volume 3 - we published a poem by Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian poet and playwright.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was also a human rights activist, particularly concerned with minority rights. He was the President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People. The Ogoni are one of about twenty ethnic groups that inhabit the Niger delta region. This area has enormous oil resources, which are being exploited by the Dutch and British owned Royal Dutch Shell and the American oil company, Chevron Corporation, which hold the primary oil concessions in Ogoniland. It is the revenue from oil that keeps Nigeria afloat.

The movement headed by Saro-Wiwa demanded for the impoverished Ogoni a fair share of oil revenue from the central government and from the two oil companies and for compensation for environmental damage caused by Shell. The agitation has given rise to civil strife and protest which has forced them to temporarily shut down their operations.

The Nigerian military dictatorship, which had cancelled the results of the 1993 election which would have returned the country to civilian rule, could not afford to let this situation continue. Its response was a trumped up murder charge against Saro-Wiwa and eight of his associates in the movement. The predictable outcome was a sentence of death on all the accused.

The Civil Liberties Organisation called the trial and the sentence a "travesty of justice". It said:

The entire trial was riddled with procedural irregularities in a curious display of force and intimidation which manifested a clear bias against Saro-Wiwa and others.  
and demanded a new trial, trying to hold the military rulers to their promises to respect the rule of law.

The Nigerian government ignored all the appeals made by various countries and organisations for clemency and the death sentences were carried out in early November. It was this callous disregard of all proprieties that pushed the Commonwealth, at its meeting in Auckland, to suspend Nigeria from membership and is now leading to discussion of sanctions at the UN.

Meanwhile, more and more Ogoni are being arrested. One member of the movement has said that increasing intimidation has led some Ogoni to migrate to other areas. Shell says that it "will not go back there until there is mutual trust between us and the local community" but it has not moved to settle the disputes or to intervene with the Nigerian government to settle the Ogoni claims.

We mourn Ken Saro-Wiwa's death; we hope that the Nigerian people will be able to return soon to a democratic life with respect for human rights. We reproduce below a poem that illustrates his attitude to the military rulers; it is an ironic twist that the "just a joke" were able to contrive his death.

#### BABANGIDANCE (2)

A little to the left  
And nothing can be right  
One step forward  
And five backward  
And stand at ease  
Babangidance

Is it a jive  
A samba jam  
A rumba craze  
A rowdy rock  
Or just a joke?  
Babangidance

You are banned  
Totally banned  
Then unbanned  
Giddy giddy ban  
And bang bang bang  
Babangidance

Rawlings and co  
Did a Doe  
Turned their boats  
Burned their boats  
And shot their feet  
Babangidance

About turn!  
Rapid fire!  
Order legs!  
Slope feet!  
And as you were!  
Babangidance

Take a dash  
Don't be dashed  
Who can guess  
Just what it is  
makes Babangidance  
Oh, such a mess!