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## The Impact of Autocratic Rule on Individual Freedom, Peace and Security in Sierra Leone

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the impact of autocratic rule on individual freedom, peace and security in Sierra Leone based on the Lockean idea of “Social Contract”. The author argues that Locke had lost fate in the peaceful co-existence of men in the state of nature in which Lock claimed many things are wanting. The society is said to be more peaceful when there are means to maintain freedom, peace and security. To achieve this end, society of men must come into agreement with each other in order to ascribe roles and responsibilities to people in manning the affairs of the state. The work contends that the political thoughts provided by Lock served as a revolutionary tool for radical political thinkers in history and modern times. It set the platform for the causes of most civil disobediences and political revolutions especially, when men of the legislative order failed to deliver the good for which they were elected. Reviews of equally similar scholarly writings suggest that these revolutionary trends continue to have serious grip on the role of the state in recent times. The paper investigates the areas where states have gone wrong in living up to their tasks and concludes that states that have bridged the social contract have been plunged into conflict leading to the complete dissolution of the autocratic order as in the case of the Sierra Leone’s civil war, 1991 – 2002.

**Keywords:** Sierra Leone; Autocratic Rule; Individual Freedom; Security; Peace.

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## **1. Introduction**

The political thoughts and influential writings of John Locke opined that people have the right to live in a state that is governed by natural laws free from harm and unjust rule. In effect, people have the right to preserve their natural rights and decide on how the community of men should be governed. Several scholarly attributions to John Locke also hold similar view that Locke's philosophical writings engineered the glorious revolution in England and also the Declaration of Independence in the United States in the 17th and 18th centuries. This notion is further acknowledged by one of the Founding Fathers Richard Henry Lee, of the Declaration of Independence that the Declaration itself was a blue print of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government 1690* [1,2]. However, these events actually led to the establishment of modern constitutionalism and legislative legitimacy for most governments today.

This work follows similar path with a focus on the impact of autocratic rule on individual freedom, peace and security in Sierra Leone based on the Lockean idea of "Social Contract". The paper holds the view that Locke had lost fate in the peaceful co-existence of men in the state of nature in which he said "there are many things wanting" [3]. Therefore, society is said to be more peaceful when there are means to maintain freedom, peace and security. A society without any semblance of government is bound to be in a state of anarchy and war with each other [4,5]. To achieve this end, society of men must come into agreement with each other in order to ascribe roles and responsibilities to people in manning the affairs of the state [2].

The paper contends that the political thoughts provided by Lock served as a revolutionary tool for radical political thinkers in history and modern times. It set the platform for the causes of most civil disobediences and political revolutions especially, when men of the legislative order failed to deliver the good for which they were elected. This revolutionary trend continues to have serious grip on the role of the state in recent times. States that have bridged the social contract have been plunged into conflict leading to the complete dissolution of the autocratic order. The paper therefore, seek to investigate the areas where states have gone wrong in living up to such task and what seem to be the reasons for their failure in the case of Sierra Leone.

### ***1.1 Background to Sierra Leone's Political System***

Sierra Leone, a small former British Colonial territory inherited its independence on 27th April 1961 on the promise of a new era and the beginning of a budding democracy based on the Westminster system. The country practiced a parliamentary system with elected representatives with legislative powers. The executive arm of government was solely the responsibility of the existing cabinet with the Prime Minister as head of government. The Supreme Court served as the highest institution in the judiciary system with an independent jurisdiction. The decentralization of powers took the form of local government with institutions and heads performing important functions in their respective chiefdoms and communities. Politicians served as the link between the people and government. Regular free and transparent elections served the basis for electing and replacing parliamentary representatives if the people realized that elected representatives were not serving the purpose of their elections. However, the country enjoyed relative freedom, peace and security under the political leadership of Prime Minister Sir Milton Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) from 1961 to 1964. The

country's political system turned to a new chapter after the Prime Minister's death in 1964. The Prime Minister was succeeded by his younger brother Sir Albert Margai, whose rule pioneered the demise of the nation's democracy by falling into a one-party political dictatorship in Sierra Leone. Sir Albert's attempt of constitutional amendment by turning Sierra Leone into a one-party democracy led to what came to be known as the worst autocratic rule in the history of Sierra Leone. The controversial election of 1967 was won by the opposition All People's Congress (APC) as observed: The APC instituted a highly centralized, inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic system of government, marginalizing the people and robbing them of their rights and freedoms. Henceforward policy acquired a national character only when it is originated from State House [6].

### ***1.2 Objective of the Study***

The major objective of this study is to investigate the impact of autocratic rule on individual freedom, peace and security in Sierra Leone since independence (1961). The paper assesses the level of individual freedom enjoyed by citizens under the rule of the two major political parties, the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in line with the Lockean principle of "social contract" by gauging equally the autocratic tendencies and the level of peace and security related issues demonstrated during these periods.

### ***1.3 Limitations of the Study***

The study covers historical records on Sierra Leone since independence (1961) and post-independence eras. The limited number of documentary evidence and scholarly literatures on the subject under investigation during these periods poses serious challenge in an attempt to unravel the myths behind the rule of the two most influential political parties, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All Peoples Congress in Sierra Leone. Although there are recent scholarly articles on Sierra Leone, but the country's historical records, geo-political, socio-economic and cultural dynamics have not been well asserted in studies which give room for further research in the field. Given the regional and tribal dynamics as well as the two most prominent political parties' affiliations, authors most times had to be careful in discussing and Analyzing issues related to the rules of the two major political parties since independence to present date Sierra Leone.

## **2. Locke's Theory of Social Contract on the Origin of Government**

Political transition from the State of Nature to a political society marked the beginning of government based on individual consent. According to Locke, the emergence of political society "depends upon the consent of the individuals to join into and make one society, who, when they are thus incorporated, might set up what form of government they thought fit" [3]. This concept applies in the case of Sierra Leone when the people consented by uniting together asking for their independence from Britain. The citizens also decided on a compact by forming a government for their freedom, peace and security. Locke's theory also holds that "Individuals must be willing to make a compact, subscribe to the laws of the given political society and choose to live by the political leadership [3]. The dispensation of justice in the state of nature appears crucial and as a result every man in the state of nature is considered a judge in his own rights. The natural laws of nature also seemed problematic whereby individuals seek justice by force that is mostly destructive in nature. This led to the setting

up of government systems that has the legislative, executive and judiciary arms of government in order to maintain law and order in an atmosphere of peace and security. The belief in the origin of government offered by Lock is said to be as a result of the following:

The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting [3]. This is also common of modern democracies where men that form a majority can consent into electing a government charged with the responsibility of maintaining freedom, peace and security of the given society.

### ***2.1 State Security and the Protection of Property***

From a revolutionary perspective, Locke's philosophical thought on the purpose of forming a government is justified by the time when England was at its brink of slavery and ruin. The English revolution of 1688 led to the overthrow of King James II and the English Parliament became more superior over the Monarch. This event gave right to most English citizens including women to participate in elections by voting in 1918 [2]. Similar incident occurred in Sierra Leone with the revolutionary incursion in 1992 which shall be discussed further later in this paper. Two of the fundamental principles ascribed to Locke's natural laws in the *Second Treaties of Government 1690* are chiefly the right to societal preservation and self-preservation against any arbitrary and absolute rule. The third of Locke's natural rights is the right to the commons which nature has offered mankind. This is further noted as the right to possessions such as 'property' which individuals acquire with a mixture of their sweats [3]. In the case of seventeenth century England, Hancey argues that an understanding of natural law had to be grounded in reason, because it was upon the principle of reason that the law was founded [7].

State's failure in the protection and security of its people are mostly the causes of civil disobedience and revolutions. With the powers vested in the elected legislative in Locke's system of government in the commonwealth, the supreme power which resides in the people always prevail whenever the elected authorities attempt to go wrong in discharging their respective duties. The crucial clause of Locke's "Social Contract" is the limitations on the powers and authorities of the delegated body through separation of powers among the legislative, executive and the federative arms of government. For Locke, the exercise of power in the state is subject to the approval of the people without which the delegated legislative enjoys little privilege in undertaking tasks that are deemed by the people as contravening the legislative powers [3].

### ***2.2 The Preservation of Freedom and Civil Liberty***

By the end of political society, individuals give up their powers, liberties they initially enjoy in the state of nature by surrendering it to the legislative power of the new society which they enter into with the goal of protecting and ensuring their individual rights and liberties for their own good. The power of the society or legislative constituted by them can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good, but is obliged to secure every one's property against those things that make society uneasy and unsafe [3]. In the case of England, Locke made reference to the freedom and liberty of the people in conventional terms to be enfranchised and elected coupled with the liberty of forming a new legislative in cases of government

dissolution. Locke's state of nature does not necessary give licenses to individuals in terms of absolute freedom and liberty. The basis of Locke's theory is that people in the State of Nature are guided by moral principles from God [8]. Following this moral principles, man is allowed to live freely but must not harm one another and should be able to preserve one's life, liberty health, possession and freedom. Autocratic rules therefore, do not grant individuals the required freedom and liberty. Political restrictions and oppression are at its highest peak in autocratic societies. The essence of Locke's social contract theory is to have a system of government agreed to by the people to provide individuals with peaceful environment where people can coexist without any intimidation and interference from within and outside the existing state.

Hobbe's view on the State of Nature is a state of war as compared to Locke. However, the State of Nature is also bound to get into conflict with one another when there is the absence of the rule of law and order. Transition from the State of Nature to a "community of men" is for men to come together as one body and consent to have a government without which the society of men will not be at peace with each other. According to Rousseau, "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains" [9]. The Social Contract between men serves as checks and balances on individual actions and the activities of government. Forming and coming into a "political organization is a pervasive future of human life" [10]. Schmitz on the other hand argues that "to justify an institution in general is to show that it is what it should be, or does what it should do" [11]. Governments created out of Social Contract should be replica of what it was created for and must live up to the expectations of those who created it. Contractarianism holds that states are normally justified after obtaining the consent of the people and remain to exist as the kind of society that rational agents would agree to have for their freedom, peace and security.

### ***2.3 Maintenance of the Rule of Law and the Dispensation of Justice***

Locke's philosophy on the Social Contract theory is to have a system of government that will seek the interest of the people by protecting them from injustice as it were in the State of Nature. In the State of Nature, men seek justice on their own accord by punishing transgressors and at times violate individual liberty and freedom. The beginning of political society marks the consent of people coming together under one political leadership and every man shall be bound to consent to the new laws of the given society as compared to the Natural Laws in the State of Nature [3]. According to Gardner, "Locke's concept of justice includes both dimensions of his thought: the rational and the religious, the individual and the communal, the conservative and also the radical" [12]. Locke is considered as one of the proponents of liberal constitutionalism and holds the view that legislative powers supersede the powers of executive prerogatives. For Ward, "liberal constitutionalism is practically inseparable from the principle that any legitimate political order must be governed by a fundamental law governing and regulating the persons and institutions that make and execute the law" [13]. The constitution is therefore, what the legislature says it is. The exercise of supreme executive powers in the case of England is perceived as exercising prerogative authority through the law of mitigation in the interest of the people. For example, "the power of calling parliaments in England, as to the precise time, place, and duration, is certainly a prerogative of the king" [3]. Locke's theory of separation of powers of both the executive and the legislature are mostly core to the liberal aspects of modern constitutionalism. Locke's "theory of separation of powers presents in many ways the culmination of historical process which linked medieval constitutionalism to modern

version” [14]. The State of Nature is considered as a “State of perfect Freedom” without “Civil Law” and “Authority” to reside over men and in cases of conflict that are deemed as bridged of the Natural Laws. The Natural Laws in the State of Nature are derived from reason guided by moral principles with the view that all men are equal and none shall harm one another. The greater constraint in the exercise of authoritative power in implementing the law of nature therefore, is problematic. Men seeking to apply the law end up violating the no-harm principle. There is indeed the chief need for constitutionalism, because the condition in the State of Nature is primarily characterized by the absence of civil law. “The absence of a single common authority might even seem to make civil society indistinguishable from the state of nature” [15]. In essence, the State of Nature necessarily remains a constant legal possibility where there is no single sovereign authority and men who decide to live in such a state are still in the state of Nature without any body of rule [3]. Therefore, Locke conceived that civil society of men are more likely the same as in the State of Nature but by conforming to consent and transit to a commonwealth will help solve the inadequacies that exist in the State of Nature. The role of the Magistrate therefore, is well captured in Locke’s political frame of thought as pointed out by Scott: Locke draws between the State of Nature and the State of War allows him to create a sovereignless state wherein the absence of a common judge among the claimants to supreme power need not necessarily be a condition of war [15].

In autocratic rules, the supreme powers of the executive in most cases over stepped its boundaries and circumvent the powers and prescribed law making roles of the legislative body. Locke however concludes that the law of nature would be useless in the State of Nature without an authoritative institution or body to execute the laws [3]. The aim of men coming together under one body of government is therefore, to institute the rule of law and legitimacy in the dispensation of justice, law and order in society.

### **3. The Beginning of Autocratic Rule in Sierra Leone**

The beginning of autocratic rule in Sierra Leone marked the political transition from a Westminster Parliamentary system of government to a Republican Constitution in 1971. It all points back to the attempt by Sir Albert Margai of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) short lived autocratic tendencies to make Sierra Leone a one-party state from 1964-1968. The 1967 elections actually gave way to the coming to power of the All Peoples’ Congress (APC) for the first time in the history of Sierra Leone. It is the election that placed the country in the hands of an absolute autocrat, Siaka Stevens in 1968. The actual conduct and aftermaths of the 1967 controversial elections shall be dealt with in later parts of this work. The APC coming to power in 1968 after series of political upheavals turned once a country of free men with an atmosphere of civil liberty, peace and security into an oppressed, corrupt and absolute autocratic state [16].

The APC government under the leadership of Siaka Stevens through fraudulent means suppressed its political opponents, the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) in 1968. The House of Representatives saw the beginning of unjust rule and with the judiciary fully in support of the autocratic dictates of the APC. It also opened the road for a one-party governance dispensation in Sierra Leone. As argued by Abdullah, the political culture and centralization of political powers of the APC under Siaka Stevens led to the formation of informal opposition by university students mostly from the Fourah Bay College and youths against corrupt officials and decedents of the APC [16].

Sierra Leone witnessed “centralization of state power, personalization of authority and the extension of state control into most sectors of society” [17]. The country also suffered from weakening state institutions, the development of autonomous structures and state failures that led to the lack of accountability. The centralization of political power in the hands of Siaka Stevens continued unabated from 1970 to 1980s. The continued decline in state and institutional effectiveness mostly in the areas of taxation, road and transport systems, education and agricultural production made Sierra Leone a decaying nation by 1980. The leadership of Siaka Stevens proved more or less Sierra Leone a nation with the concentration of wealth in the hands of few political elites mostly the APC cronies with a magnitude of disconnection between the people and the political authorities. It was at this peak of political decay that Siaka Stevens decided to hand over power to Joseph Saidu Momoh in 1985. President Momoh’s leadership acumen and his demised leading to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invasion of Sierra Leone in 1991 will be assessed in later parts of this work.

It is mostly argued that ethnic political tensions and rivalry among the northern (Temne ethnic tribe) and the south-eastern (Mende ethnic tribe) that took over the mantle of leadership at independence make up the genesis for the entrenched nature of the APC rule from 1968-1992 in Sierra Leone. The Temne northern politicians viewed the All People’s Party (APC) as their own political party while the Mende viewed the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) as their own political party. The Temnes felt they have been long excluded from the political cycle and saw the APC as a party that will end the “Mende political dominance and make possible the social emancipation of the northerners” [18,19].

In Sierra Leone, the year 1973 saw an increase in the number of official positions with the APC accounting for about 41.1 percent of cabinet ministers mostly Temnes as compared to its rivalry party the SLPP with merely 14.3 percent in 1964. This ethno-politicization continues to present day Sierra Leone. The northerners in general hold 70.4 percent of Sierra Leone’s cabinet positions in the former President Ernest Bai Koroma’s government. The kind of ethnic composition in the political spheres also led to the erosion of administrative and other official public employment issues with mainly political patronage and ethnic consideration. The northern Limba ethnic group is also the third largest ethnic group in Sierra and Siaka Stevens emerged from the Limbas.

### ***3.1 The 1967 Controversial Elections***

The rule of Sir Albert Margai was short lived as a result of the 1967 controversial elections that was narrowly won by Siaka Stevens of the All People’s Congress (APC). This event caused constitutional crisis and threatened the peace and security of the nation. Due to the controversies among the two major political parties, the incumbent Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and the All People’s Congress (APC), a military coup led by Brigadier Lansana took over control of the state on the 21st March 1967 after the Governor General, Sir Lightfoot Boston declared Siaka Stevens of the APC as the winner of the elections. The reason for such hasty declaration was that Sierra Leone was already sitting on a time bomb and series of meetings for a compromise between the two parties to form a coalition had proved futile by the Governor General.

The above event was followed by a counter military coup two days after Brigadier Lansana’s seizure of power. The senior military officers that took over the helm of state affairs on 23rd March hastily formed the National

Reformation Council (NPC) that signaled the end of the last multi-party democracy in black Africa [20]. However, the formation of the NRC did not forestall peace and security in Sierra Leone. On 18th April 1968, there was a third military coup orchestrated by non-commissioned military officers that ousted the regime of the NRC. Following the fragile political situation in the country, members of the third coup reinstated Siaka Stevens of the APC as head and Prime Minister of Sierra Leone in 1968. According to Fisher, “although the citizens were able to reach their goal for a change of government amidst electoral malpractices, the campaigns and the coups were influenced by the contagion of ideas from other African States, particularly Ghana” [20]. Earlier in 1966, Ghana had also undergone similar military coup d'état overthrowing the government of Kwame Nkrumah. Siaka Stevens upon regaining power quickly declared a state of emergency as a means of quelling down the tension, but in actual fact marked the beginning of a long walk towards what came to be known as a one-party state under the APC government. The aftermaths of the 1967 controversial elections turned Sierra Leone into a Republican State with Siaka Stevens as its first President under a republican constitution in 1971.

### ***3.2 The All People's Congress Party Rule***

In 1968, Siaka Stevens of the APC was named Prime Minister of Sierra Leone and the APC became the first opposition party to take over governmental control in Sierra Leone. Siaka Stevens's accession to power came as a result of a popular outcry of majority Sierra Leoneans. The leadership of Sir Albert Margai was heavily criticized both within the SLPP and outside of the party. Citizens were also against the dictatorial tendencies of Sir Albert's rule especially, with the proposition of a one-party state in Sierra Leone. As a result, Sir Albert lost the 1967 elections narrowly to the APC. As observed by Hayward, the prospect for Sierra Leone seemed bright with the coming to power of Siaka Stevens of the APC in 1968:

Sierra Leoneans appeared to be united behind Siaka Stevens. There was broadly based grass roots support for the government among farmers, students, professionals, and workers, in most parts of the country. The APC seemed able to attract talented professionals to its ranks and to positions in government. The political elite were held in high esteem. The press was again active, the judiciary outspoken, and the military under control. Once again, Sierra Leone gave evidence of a political leadership which would live up to expectations and would transform the state and benefit the people [17].

However, the agitated prospect began to crumble as early as 1970 and the APC appeared to have also lost sight of the freedom, peace and security the leaders have promised to the people. The country began to face difficulties in mostly the things majority citizens have long kicked against that gave the upper hand to the APC in the elections. The people began to receive the reward of their trust in the APC through repressive and oppressive forms of governance.

Although there were also criticisms within the APC rank and files, the party failed to listen to it members who were left with no other option but to quit the APC and form their own political party that will be able to address the problems of the already suffering masses. The APC in retaliation, quelled all other party activities by arresting most of their leaders and detaining them without trial.

### **3.3 Transition from Multi-Party to One-Party Rule**

According to the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Sierra Leone officially became a one-party state through scrupulous constitutional manipulations and amendments in 1978 [21]. The main goal of the APC was to halt party competition and make the APC as the one and only political party in Sierra Leone. The APC government held its first elections in 1982 under the one-party constitution which were merged with fraud and violent activities targeting opposition members.

The one-party rule is considered a by-product of Sir Albert Margai's rule in Sierra Leone. Although the one-party proposal was vehemently criticized both within the SLPP and outside with the opposition APC, it however became evident as the basis for political oppression in Sierra Leone. The APC who had initially criticized Albert Margai now became the promoter of the one-party ideology in 1978. The APC used the one-party system to halt political competition merged with huge electoral malpractices in Sierra Leone.

The one-party system, previously opposed by the APC, was now hailed as an antidote to ethnic politics and electoral violence and a requirement for national integration and economic development. This shift to a one-party system criminalized the exercise of basic freedoms, unmasked the class basis of electoral violence and ethnic politics, and radically altered the electoral landscape [9].

The APC as already discussed also had a regional and tribal component in its rule. Most of the important administrative and official positions were held by northerners. Marginalization of other tribal groups such as the Mendes that were predominantly from the south-east were deemed by the APC as a threat to their rule accusing them of their past rule as more corrupt and tribal. The concentration of political power therefore, were mostly Limba centered beginning with Siaka Stevens in 1968-1985 followed by his hand-picked successor, Joseph Saidu Momoh of the APC. The autocratic rule of Siaka Stevens came to an end after his official declaration of retirement in 1985. This announcement came as a relief to the citizenry with a new hope that Sierra Leone was finally going to regain its democratic status. Siaka Stevens therefore, hand-picked his tribe's man Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh to succeed him in the leadership of the country. As a major task to re-establish political order, President Momoh dashed the hopes of the people and continues to build on the dictatorial legacy that has been orchestrated by his predecessor.

### **4. The Impact of Autocratic Rule on Individual Freedom, Peace and Security**

The APC government under Siaka Stevens marked the beginning of a new era in the political lives of the citizens. Intimidation and oppression of political opponents became the order of the day by arbitrarily arresting and detaining political opponents mainly from the SLPP without trial. The continued oppressive nature of the APC called to question the very tenets of democracy and the promised of the APC to the people of Sierra Leone for open elections, a free press, and a competitive party system [17].

According to Kandeh, "corruption and nepotism on the part of ethnic oligarchy deepened the unpopularity of the APC and accelerated its demise. As socioeconomic conditions worsened under one-party rule, internal (students, teachers, workers) and external (end of the cold war, political liberalization in Eastern Europe, IMF

conditionalities) pressures to liberalize the political system intensified” [19]. The struggle for a return to democratic governance continued in Sierra Leone beginning with the students’ nation-wide strike in opposition to the APC rule in 1977 [16].

The economic downturn and the hardship faced by most Sierra Leoneans forced President Momoh to agree on plans geared towards the dissolution of the one-party system of government in 1991. A committee was therefore, immediately appointed by President Momoh to review the 1978 one-party constitution. The National Constitutional Review Committee (NCRC) recommended the removal of the APC as the one and only recognized party thereby allowing multi-party politics and a new constitution was approved for Sierra Leone through a referendum held in 1991 [19].

#### ***4.1 The Decline in Citizens Political Participation***

The people of Sierra Leone faced several challenges such as threat to their individual freedom, peace and security of the nation. Sierra Leoneans who appeared to be a threat to the President’s autocratic tendencies were arbitrarily arrested and jailed without any formal trial. Report by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), shows that “subsequent elections from 1973 – 1976 were won by the APC amidst political oppression and intimidation of the opposition SLPP” [21].

The mass expulsion of students from Fourah Bay College who were considered as radicals and threat to the APC led to the formation of a revolutionary faction that resulted to the 1991 civil war in Sierra Leone. These students made several contacts to recruit “lumpen Sierra Leonean youths” mostly unemployed but rely on their wits who underwent military training in Benghazi, Libya [16]. According to Sierra Leone’s former President Kabbah, bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of citizen’s basic rights fueled the civil war in Sierra Leone. As argued by Ali, opposition supporters faced several challenges and denial to a fair share of the country’s resources. Access to job and the indiscriminate dismissals of civil servants who were considered “not in line” with the APC dictatorial rule took center stage in Sierra Leone’s politics. Awarding of jobs within the civil and public domain were based on “connectocracy rather than meritocracy” [6].

Regional disparity in the distribution of the country’s resources also came to the forefront with series of intimidation and oppression of citizens from regions that were perceived anti-government supporters. As a result, some radicals and opposition members went underground with the hope of waiting for the right time to revenge on the oppressive ruling party. This however, led to silencing the opposition through the use of force as citizens realized that their every move against the oppressive ruling of the government will yield counter intimidation and the use of force by the police and armed forces.

#### ***4.2 Suppression on Press Freedom, Political Association and Assembly***

The role of the press seemed very crucial in Sierra Leone’s politics especially, under a dictatorial and oppressed regime. Sierra Leone took the position of partly-free state in both Freedom House’s global report of 2008 and 2015 respectively. According to 2014 report by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), the report quoted Freedom House to have cited the “closure of a radio station in June 2007 in Pujehun town by an MP

from that area; and also the temporary closure of a radio station in Koinadugu district by a group of youths in February 2008” [21].

The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone safeguards and guarantees the fundamental human rights and the freedom of the individual. Article (15) maintained that “every person in Sierra Leone is entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedom of the individual, that is to say, has the right whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights of others and for the public interest [...]”. On the protection of freedom of assembly and association, Article 26, Sub-section (1) of the Sierra Leone 1991 Constitution also maintained that:

Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of assembly and association, that is to say, his right to assemble freely and associate with other persons and in particular to form or belong to any political party, trade unions or other economic, social or professional associations, national or international, for the protection of his interests.

The maintenance of fundamental human rights, freedom of association and assembly in Sierra Leone faced serious challenge since the beginning of 2007 with the return of the All People’s Congress (APC) party in power. The rule of the APC has always followed an oppressive footpath and political intimidation of opponents. Any criticism from the public or the press usually faced brutal retaliations from the ruling party.

Tribalism, cronyism and nepotism in the public service are strong features of the APC rule in Sierra Leone. The Public service witnessed the dismissals of a number of high-level public officials on allegations of “active political involvement.” The government developed policies and legal instruments in 2007 that “prevented individuals holding political appointments from associating with the political parties of their freedom of choice.” One typical example to public knowledge is the dismissal of the Governor General of the Central Bank of Sierra Leone as a result of his association with the main opposition SLPP in 2007” [21].

#### ***4.3 Civil Conflict and the Return to Democratic Rule***

The oppression and dictatorial tendencies of the APC government forced some opposition members in Pujehun District to result into forming a “guerrilla movement” known as the “Ndorgborwusui” as a resistance against the APC with the aim of safeguarding their individual freedom, peace and security. This virtually led to the aspiration of most youths from Pujehun District for joining the Revolutionary United Front at the time of the rebel insurgency in Sierra Leone in 1991 [6]. The incapability of President Momoh in effectively governing the country plunged the nation into conflict in 1991 risking the peace and security of the country. The insecurity posed by the war perpetrated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) culminated the overthrow of the APC administration under President Momoh in April, 1992 by a group of junior officers led by Captain Valentine Strasser [22].

The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by Strasser pledged to effectively deal with the internal political conflict, end the civil war and return the country to democratic governance proved unsuccessful. The country faced an indecision between “peace before elections and elections before peace” in 1996. However,

the mandate of the people stood amidst pressure and mounted mutilation perpetrated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Sierra Leone therefore, had its first democratic elections during the mid of the civil war in 1996 that brought to power President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Maada Bio who later took over power from Captain Strasser officially handed power to President Kabbah in 1996 returning Sierra Leone to a democratic nation after two decades under the APC dictatorial rule.

The 2007 democratic elections in Sierra Leone saw the return of the APC to power with Ernest Bai Koroma as its leader since the party's overthrow in 1992. Subsequent election in 2012 was also won by the APC which later faced serious challenge from the people of Sierra Leone. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) report by Umaru Fofanah on 18th March 2015, the APC government is accused of corruption, disregard for human rights and the rule of law. The unconstitutional removal of the country's elected Vice President on the 18th March 2015 by President Ernest Bai Koroma faced serious challenge by some quarters of the citizens, opposition parties, civil society organizations and pressure groups in Sierra Leone. The country is yet to recover from the worst hit Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014 that took almost 3000 lives and the mudslide that also took over 1000 thousand lives of innocent Sierra Leoneans.

The 2018 Presidential elections in Sierra Leone have been won by the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) under the leadership of Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio who had equally promised the people of Sierra the fight against corruption, indiscipline and poverty. Members of the opposition APC who held senior cabinet positions, heads of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are currently been investigated for their stewardship while the Ant-Corruption is equally pursuing individuals who have found wanting of corrupt practices in Sierra Leone.

## **5. Conclusion**

The people of Sierra Leone had suffered and continue to suffer in the hands of autocratic rule since the death of the country's first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai in 1964. The country's history is full of records of oppression of individuals, the press and freedom of political association and assembly. The freedom of the individual to expression and association with a political party has always been the choice of the political leadership. The regimes of Sir Albert Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) from 1964 to 1968, followed by Siaka Stevens of the All People's Party (APC) from 1968 to 1985 and Ernest Bai Koroma from 2007 - 2018 are typical examples of political leaderships that had portrayed autocratic and dictatorial rule in Sierra Leone. The successor of Siaka Stevens, Joseph Saidu Momoh also followed similar pattern of autocratic rule with an entrenched tribal component coupled with the use of force on individuals and political opponents in Sierra Leone.

These dictatorial and oppressive nature of previous regimes gave cause to a decade long civil war that engulf the nation from 1991 to 2002 which also led to the overthrow of President Momoh's government through a military coup d'état in 1992. The war led to the death of over fifty thousand (50,000) people and the destruction of educational, economic and developmental activities in Sierra Leone. The untold stories of rape, the physical maiming and amputation of individuals are the hall marks and negative impacts of an oppressive rule and the

outcome of a revolution against such rule in a country.

The Social Contract theory of John Lock in the case of Sierra Leone holds mainly for the protection of individual freedom, liberty, preservation of property and the maintenance of peace and security of the state where there is an absent of the rule of law. These basic tenets are enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, but past and present regimes have always flouted the very premise on which the consent and legislature was build. The main goal of the citizens in their aspiration for independence from Great Britain in 1961 was for the people to come together as one body through consent under one single authority that will safeguard their freedom, maintain peace and security of the nation. The present Commission of Inquiry and the Anti-Corruption Commission's hunt for corrupt officials, individuals and businesses are clear manifestations of a country that has once been married to corrupt regimes that have gone against the social contract milieu, but are yet to pay for their crimes not only by means of removing or replacing them through the ballot box, but by holding them accountable to the people who once elected them.

## **6. Recommendations**

Based on the Lockean principle, the society of men coming into contract for the preservation of individual freedom, peace and security serve as the moral guarantor for the community of men to live in harmony. But where the will of the exiting autocratic leadership seemed to favour activities that suppressed the freedom of the ordinary citizens, that moral guarantor becomes questionable and as a result, it is advisable that states should adhere to whatever social contract they might have entered into with the community for the following:

### ***1. Respect for Human Right and the Rule of Law***

It has most often been a common scene in Sierra Leone where the ruling governments go against their constitutional mandates since the days of late Prime Minister Sir Albert Margai of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), late President Siaka Stevens and his successor, late President Joseph Saidu Momoh both of the All Peoples Congress (APC). The autocratic tendencies of these former leaders have in most cases been discussed as being responsible for the current state of nature in Sierra Leone. Each of the two main political parties once in power always strives to muscle the rights of its opponents through dictatorial and autocratic means which at times presents an unhealthy political atmosphere in the country. It is therefore, recommended that government of any sort must be mindful of its social contract with the electorates and should strive to always respect individual human rights devoid of political party affiliations and as well work hard to maintain the rule of law and preserve the state's national constitution as a fountain of peace and security in the country.

### ***2. Preservation of Social and Political Order***

The preservation of the social and political order in society play vital role in bringing the community of men together by engaging in decision making that mostly benefits the entire citizenry. Social and political cohesion are major facets in ascertaining individual liberty within the state. Where social and political orders are undermined, there is always every likelihood of one party getting aggrieved with the actions of the other as demonstrated by the current state of the state parliament where the opposition (APC) is most often agog with the

actions of the ruling party (SLPP) which led to their Parliamentarians walking out of Parliament on the State's opening of Parliament in May 2019. It is however, recommended that government- in-government-out; the political party in power should crave to create an atmosphere of social and political order where everybody will be considered important in national decision making without any fear intimidation or discrimination since the coming to power of any political party depends on the social contract entered into by the community of men for a specified period of time.

### **3. Responsive to National Interest**

It is mostly the responsibility of the ruling government as well as opposition parties to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the electorates as they are the determinants of the victory most political parties earned during election periods. The bread and butter issues that lie closer to the hearts of the ordinary citizens coupled with other related social amenities should be treated with utmost respect by political parties in power. Whatever the situation might be at a given time ranging from human right abuses, constitutional bridge, state peace and security should be considered paramount to the incumbent and other political players in the field as such may be used against the government during polling day given the fact that there has been a bridge of the social contract by failing to adequately respond to the national interest of the community of men.

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