

JUNTA MEANS TOGETHER

by ?

"I would like to begin by exploring some anecdotes from history which should, as I recount them, prove relevant to my case. May I?"

"I have no reason to stop you," the colonel sighed. "Proceed."

The elderly scholar lifted his glasses to the bridge of his nose. As he scanned the hurried notes he had prepared in his cell, a military tribunal comprised of two young zealots and their newly-installed commander, the colonel, shifted impatiently in their folding chairs. The canvas courtroom had become intolerably hot.

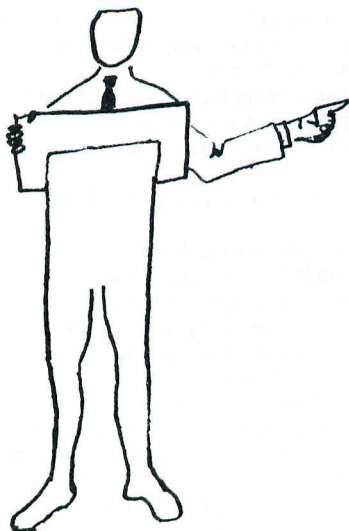
"In the West African savanna, there was a cleric named Usman don Fodio who instigated *jihad*, or Holy Struggle, against secular authorities. The ostensible rationale for this uprising was the impious administration of the Sarkis. Usman don Fodio led the faithful against the government to purge society of its impure elements. Usman then instituted an Islamic theocracy with himself as the secular head.

"As you military men might know, the legions of Rome were disciplined by their commanders in the following manner: every tenth legionnaire, regardless of record, breeding, or general worth to the empire, was killed by his comrades-in-arms. The perpetual threat of decimation is reported to have deterred excessive softness.

"During the French Revolution, the streets ran red, first with royal blood. Each party, or faction, relied upon assassination or execution to settle accounts and, quote, to secure the republic, close quote. Of course, the factions turned against each other for the same reasons—and with the same result.

"You are no doubt aware that Hitler, over in Germany, blamed the Jews for economic ruin. In fact, he ascribed to them genetic inferiority, and the rise of Nazism brought with it genocide."

The colonel, finding the tent already too humid for academics, interrupted the old professor in hopes of concluding the case quickly. He settled back in his chair and growled.



"Your argument is clear enough, sir. You would label the junta an oppressor. And since we have taken the government by force, we are illegitimate, also. Is this not your defense?"

The scholar looked up from his notes at the inquisitor. "I am sorry, but I realize that defense is futile. Please allow me to continue my remarks, which are not at an end."

"But it is simple, no? These stories tell me about misguided slaughter, and you would reason that we are guilty of the very same today."

"History is subtler than that, good sir. Let me go on."

The colonel merely waved his hand.

"Now, to illustrate the distinction I am trying to make, I would like to remind the court of the Basques in northern Spain. When Napoleon invaded the Iberian peninsula, Spain failed to repel him militarily. However, the populace did resist in other ways. For instance, gangs would isolate one soldier on patrol, castrate him, nail him to a nearby barn, and then leave him to terrify his comrades when they discovered his suspended corpse.

"Moving north and over one hundred years later, we know Stalin ruled the Soviet Union by purging its citizenry and creating a vast nation-within-a-nation of prisoners, or *zeks*. Over 66 million Russians were incarcerated and either went to labor camps or simply executed. Stalin is credited by some with vaulting the Soviets into modern times, but the overwhelming evidence indicates in him a bureaucratic barbarianism."

The lecture broke long enough for the sweating colonel to interject.

"It is nearly noon, old man. Your tales of oppression have entertained us all. But,"—and here the colonel leaned forward to emphasize his point—"the

People's Tribunal cannot afford to bake in a steamy tent while you stretch your arguments into transparent excuses which, by the way, are invalid. Put aside your notes and speak directly."

There was silence as the scholar turned and placed his prepared statement on the table behind him. Soldiers outside brought the next prisoner, another professor, to the entrance. One of the young zealots was scribbling in his notebook.

After a moment's reflection, the scholar began, choosing his words carefully.

"Good sirs, it is not my wish to judge the integrity of your political act. History will label us all, and I suspect that it will exercise great caution before doing so. It is not my place to judge, and at this time I cannot rely upon the judgment of time, either. I have presented my defense by analogy, but the significance has been lost, I fear. I am terribly sorry. Let me try again.

"To some governments history has been kind, exonerating discipline and sacrifice. To some governments history has not been so kind, castigating these regimes for senseless brutality and murder. Its criteria are, as I have said, quite subtle. It is one of these criteria I had hoped to illustrate. Now I see that I must speak plainly."

He coughed, and the colonel again shifted noisily in his chair.

"Purges are a part of government. In that, you may feel secure. But purges must have a purpose."

"Then you question our purpose?" the colonel asked. "It is all very clear to the masses. And to anyone who would listen."

"So there is a purpose," the scholar said hesitatingly.

"Of course," was the gruff reply.

"Then my defense shall become exceedingly clear! You see, a purge with a purpose should stop just short of purposeless murder."

"There will be no purposeless murder. Only justice."

"So perhaps your purge stops just short of me, for I have in no way interfered with your coup."

"You did not join our ranks as we battled the oligarchs."

"And would I have increased greatly your battle strength?"

There was a chuckle from the entrance, from the next defendant.

"Who is not for us is against us."

"Then have I in any way threatened you?"

"Who is not **for** us is against us."

"What evidence have you that I am **not** for you? I suspect and sincerely hope that your regime will require more than brutish young men with pistols."

One of the zealots, the one who had been scribbling, responded to the comment,

"Old man, we are not amused by your charade. Accused men will stand on their heads to go free. We have no evidence that you were for us. Do you wish us to decide on that basis alone? If not, then prove otherwise."

"Can you see into my heart? I ask you, can you swear that my incarceration serves a purpose? My remarks should have impressed upon you the distinction . . ."

"Those stories you told are selective, incomplete, and irrelevant!"

"Then what," the scholar asked in hushed tones, "is relevant? For justice, men have imagined evil where there was none. For justice, they have devised means of death. And we recognize even today the necessity of occasional retribution. You say that now is the time and that I am the man. Are you so right? Why you and so many others wrong?"

The colonel rose from behind the table and gestured.

"It is, as you say, old man, necessary. I am sorry."

A guard approached the defendant for the purpose of escorting him to his execution. Knowing this, the scholar dropped his head, turned to collect his notes, and mentioned almost casually, "You were also impatient in the classroom, colonel."

The next defendant, having observed the exchange, folded his prepared statement, slid it into his breast pocket, and crossed himself without a word.

The Effect

by Lisa D. Eaton

At night my mind's prismatic
Life seems more dramatic
Bottle we hold
Make colors unfold
Sensations become numbly ecstatic