

## “When Good People Say Nothing”

By Kelfala M. Kallon

It happened on Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1973 -- in Washington, DC, USA. Professor Archibald Cox, the Special Prosecutor investigating the Watergate scandal had issued a subpoena to President Richard Nixon demanding tapes of conversations that the latter had recorded in the Oval Office. Nixon refused to honor the subpoena on the doctrine that US presidents have executive privilege to keep their conversations private. Professor Cox's son (Edward) was married to Nixon's daughter (Tricia). In spite of this familial relationship, Cox decided to go to court to enforce the subpoena. Nixon, wanting to stop Cox's investigation, ordered his Attorney-General, Elliot Richardson (a Republican and Nixon appointee), to dismiss Cox. Richardson refused and resigned in protest. Nixon then asked the Deputy Attorney-General, William French Smith (another Republican and Nixon appointee), to fire Cox. He too refused and resigned in protest. Nixon then ordered Judge Robert Bork, then Solicitor-General and the highest-ranking official in the Justice Department after the resignations, to fire Cox and he did.

To quell the furor and revulsion that the American public instantaneously showed for this gross abuse of presidential power, which became known as the Saturday Night Massacre, Nixon appointed Leon Jaworski, a Texas Democrat, as Professor Cox's replacement. He too immediately subpoenaed the Nixon tapes. When the President again ignored the subpoena, Jaworski went to Judge Sirica's Federal District Court in Washington, DC to seek a court order to force the President of the United States to turn the tapes over to the Special Prosecutor, and the court so ordered. Nixon appealed the matter to the United States Supreme Court, which swiftly and unanimously rejected the President's claim of executive privilege and ordered him to comply with Judge Sirica's order. With several articles of Impeachment of the President having passed a very-incensed House of Representatives already, the beleaguered Nixon resigned the presidency in disgrace on August 9, 1974.

The American public, as expected, rallied around the heroes of the Saturday Night Massacre (especially Messrs Cox, Richardson, and Ruckelshaus) who put family ties and party loyalty aside and saved the nation from Nixon's imperial presidency. Judge Bork, who had carried out Nixon's order, was later denied a seat on the US Supreme Court, and many Americans saw this denial as a retribution for the role he played in the Saturday Night Massacre.

Having just arrived in the United States from a land where Siaka Stevens' APC had just used unmitigated violence to return their candidates unopposed in all but one constituency in the 1973 elections, I actually shed tears when Nixon's successor, President Gerald Ford, told the American people and the world that Nixon's resignation had again proven that America is a nation of laws, not a nation of men. My tears were evoked by my realization that the American political system had forced the most powerful person in the world to respect the rule of law,

while the Sierra Leone I had left just a few months earlier had effectively become a land of one man under the APC.

Since the Nixon resignation, I have often contrasted the behavior of those noble Americans who stood their ground in the face of Nixon's imperial presidency with how similarly placed Sierra Leoneans have behaved in the face of gross abuse of presidential power. To wit, I have often wondered about what America would have been like if Messrs Elliott Richardson and William French Buckley had carried out President Nixon's orders to fire Professor Cox out of blind loyalty to Nixon or their party. I have also wondered about what Nixon would have done if the American Bar Association had remained silent on the whole matter or, more importantly, what he would have done if the members of his party in Congress had decided to endorse his gross abuse of presidential power out of blind party loyalty. Finally, I have often wondered about whether Nixon would have respected the Supreme Court's ruling if the American public had reacted to the Saturday Night Massacre with an "ow for do" nonchalance for which Sierra Leoneans are renowned. In other words, I have often wondered about whether the American political system would have remained the envy of many people around the world if "good" people had not chosen to stand their ground against the might and pomp of a very politically vindictive president.

Since President Koroma came to power in Sierra Leone, I have again been forced to wonder about what it would take for "good" Sierra Leoneans to say or do something about his revealed tendency to place APC partisans above the law. For example, when APC thugs immediately attacked the national headquarters of the SLPP as President Koroma was being sworn into office, I expected the President to do something to nip this return to violence in the bud, but he did nothing. This presidential inaction, which was obviously interpreted as a presidential endorsement, emboldened APC thugs to attack SLPP supporters and their regional headquarters in Bo -- reportedly under the direction and supervision of the President's Resident Minister, Southern Province. This was followed by attacks in Kono, Tongo-Field, and throughout the Northern Province during the recently concluded local government electioneering campaigns. Again, the President did nothing to bring the culprits to justice. Further emboldened by this apparent presidential endorsement of political violence, APC thugs have again attacked the SLPP in Freetown and Bo. Of course, as we have come to expect from the Koroma administration, no one will be punished for these dastardly attacks. On the contrary, to show that State House was in cahoots with the attackers, APC sympathizers at State House insulted and manhandled not only the SLPP leaders who had been invited by the President to discuss this recent spate of violence, but also the journalists who went to cover the meeting.

As the British philosopher, Edmund Burke, once opined, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men [and women] do nothing." Doubtlessly, we all remember too well how Siaka Stevens stealthily turned Sierra Leone into a dictatorship with the connivance of "good" people who chose not to speak up or do anything out of fear or for partisan reasons. We also know how this national silence and cooperation with evil ultimately plunged the nation into the

darkest period of its history. Hence, one would think that we would have now imbibed the lesson that Edmund Burke sought to teach mankind and, consequently, vowed to never again allow evil to triumph in Sierra Leone. However, given the way the silent majority of Sierra Leoneans, who are essentially good people, have kept quiet as President Koroma's APC has visited violence on their targets, it appears that we did not learn this salient lesson at all. Therefore, to remind "good" Sierra Leoneans that evil ultimately knows no bound, I will reproduce below Pastor Martin Neimöller's poem, "First they came for the Jews", which was written to make the same point to German intellectuals who remained silent as the Nazis visited violence on their victims:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Communist;

Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Jew;

**Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak out for me.**

The "New" APC are currently "coming" for SLPP supporters (visiting violence on their persons, dismissing them from their jobs, and destroying their party's offices), and "good" people are saying and doing nothing because they are not SLPP. They have also started coming after independent media personalities like Dr. Sylvia Blyden. Again, Sierra Leone's best and brightest, just like those German intellectuals who cooperated with Hitler, are saying and doing nothing because they are not journalists or newspaper publishers that are tagged as anti-APC. Now, they have started manhandling and throwing urine and feces at journalists and prominent Sierra Leoneans – right at State House, the seat of our nation's power. And the silent majority is still not saying anything because they are neither journalists nor SLPP.

Perhaps these Sierra Leoneans should be reminded that, as Brigadier John Bangura, Dr. Mohamed Fornah, Ibrahim Taqi, Francis Minah, former Bank Governor Sam Bangura, and countless others who cooperated with the "Old" APC when they "came" for others ultimately found out, one never knows evil's next victim when it is allowed to triumph over good. Hence, if we desire a country in which our constitutional rights are protected irrespective of political and/or tribal affiliation, "good" Sierra Leoneans must courageously put partisanship aside and make our leaders know that never again will we allow anyone to make Sierra Leone a dictatorship. However, if we continue to do and say nothing while President Koroma and his APC's thugs continue to violate the rights of other Sierra Leoneans, we will forever be condemned to deserve the "Osai, Owai, OCocaine" government that we now have.