

One Ideology, Many Parties: Nigeria in the Throes of False Pluralism

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The trouble with Nigerian politics, contrary to the dominant view in the media, is not the absence of issues-based politics or lack of ideological commitment by the existing political parties but rather that the dominant political parties are committed to the same ideology or world-view and are therefore really or essentially not different one from another and have to do everything possible to show that they are different. In an attempt to prove the impossible, namely to demonstrate that they are different from one another to 'win' or steal votes from the electorate, the parties necessarily resort to desperate tactics which negate the basic elements of liberal democracy and which indeed demonstrate the limitations of liberal democracy generally and its specific difficulties or incongruity in disoriented polities such as Nigeria's.

All the dominant parties in Nigeria, without an exception, are committed to privatisation of public utilities and assert that the state's only role in the economy is as regulator of the competing interests of the various factions of the ruling class. From Lagos to Kano and from Cross River to Sokoto we see in display various forms of what is now fashionably referred to as Public Private Sector Participation (PPP) through which everything owned by the people (including roads!) are mindlessly and rapaciously parcelled among cronies of leading members of the various governments. The class in power in Nigeria lacks the discipline or rather more appropriately, the decency, to amend its existing laws to legalise the privatisation of public wealth and institutions. Thus, privatisation is not just an immoral act of dispossessing the people of their collective wealth, it is patently and brazenly illegal as the laws of Nigeria stand today. Section 16 of the Constitution, the imposed grundnorm, emphasises the dominance of the state in the economy. In its exact language, the state has a duty to 'manage and operate the major sectors of the economy' and 'to control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity'. The constitution is not done: it provides further that 'the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group'. No labour is required to demonstrate therefore that the cannibalisation and privatisation of the Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN), although being done under an unconstitutional law, is illegal. We will cooperate with all groups and individuals committed to aborting the illegal sale of PHCN to individuals by any means necessary.

We need to restate that we are not opposed to competition in the economy. Let all those who are interested in generating, transmitting, distributing and selling electricity invest their own resources as was the case with the telecommunications industry. Many of the

companies that were licensed to either build refineries or generate electricity over 5 years ago have not been able to either lay one metre long pipe or erect a pole respectively. This gives the lie to the existence of any serious private sector in this country. What we have are middlemen and women, speculators and commission agents of capitalists in the advanced countries who produce nothing but infamy. This comprador class is a vermin and we must do everything necessary to shake it off our people.

Our people must see through the joke in the media where some parties are labelled-that is the appropriate word- as 'progressives' and others as 'reactionaries'. The truth of the matter is that none of the dominant political parties in the country today can be truly described as progressive parties. They are all reactionary parties. To those who may want to accuse me of unsound or improper generalisation, I would refer them again to the Constitution. The same section 16 states in black and white that it is the obligation of the state to ensure that 'suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens'. Parties and governments that are not providing shelter at all, that are not providing food at all, that pay extremely unreasonable wages, that neglect the old, the sick and create unemployment are not only reactionary but are irresponsible no matter what their friends in the media may think or say. The latest fraud going on now is that section 224 of the Constitution that makes it obligatory for the parties to implement section 16 of the Constitution has been removed from the Constitution. The obvious implication of this is that Chapter II of the Constitution on Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy are rendered completely meaningless, although section 13 of the Constitution enjoins all persons and authorities to enforce them. What a shameless set of reactionary politicians!

Does it then follow that all the politicians in the dominant political parties are reactionary politicians? It would be reductive, simplistic and fallacious to dismiss all the politicians in the reactionary parties as reactionary. There are some politicians who conclude, albeit erroneously, that the reactionary parties are a necessary stepping stone to political power which is crucial to their agenda of making a difference in the lives of our people. These people mean well and want to serve the people. But as history teaches us inexorably the power structure in the reactionary parties make true change impossible. The end result is that some of these progressive politicians might leave offices unstained, but if they would be honest they could never realise their aim of changing our country in the retrograde parties. 'Entreism', as the strategy of progressives joining reactionary parties is known in our literature, is doomed precisely because those parties are structured to preserve the status quo. There is also a sense in which the joining of the mainstream political parties on the ground that they are the only ones that can 'win' elections become a self-fulfilling

prophecy and shows a certain organisational laziness in some cases and opportunism in yet other cases. There is no alternative to true progressive politicians, that is, those who believe that the working people and its state must dominate life, working to build their own party.

Our media must therefore be discerning. A word or two to our media practitioners: Simply because you have sympathy for a politician or that you are on his or her payroll or because some politicians use ill gotten wealth to set up media houses does not make them progressive. They may be properly referred to as opposition politicians, but again we must ask ourselves the question as to the quality of their opposition. Is it opposition to capture or counter capture state or political power for self aggrandisement?

Our people must not just stop at being angry at the robbery going on in the country. The time has come to reclaim our sovereignty and our country. We must get organised to do battle against those who make it difficult for our children to be properly educated in public schools even though they were trained at public expense; who sell our collective institutions to their cronies; who make our people to live in shacks although they build mansions abroad from the money they steal from public treasury. We must build a truly grand alliance to defeat the forces that are pauperising our people and feeding fat on our collective wealth. Let the truly progressive parties emerge and unite. There is no time for sectarianism and petty fights. Victory is around the corner, only if we dare organise and fight.