

## Chapter Nineteen

### DEMOCRACY IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC AND BEYOND THE NIGERIA REALITY

#### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has experienced two civilian regimes, 1960-1966 and 1979-1983. In between the military had intervened controlling state apparatus and government. Some observers are quick to label civilian rule as democratic while military rule is often deemed as undemocratic. The military itself while in power often alludes that a return to civilian rule is tantamount to a return to democratic rule. It is not generally correct that civilian rule is democratic.

However, it is quite clear that since 1960 Nigeria has operated a neo-colonial capitalist economy. All regimes, civilian and military have never attempted to change that reality. Rather, each regime has attempted to perfect the development of capitalism in Nigeria. The total commitment of any Nigerian ruling class to development of capitalism is that of the present regime of president Babangida. The regime in all its policies, programs and strategies of development demonstrates an avowed commitment to capitalism.

It is the present regime which came into power in August 1984 that has set in motion a transition programme toward the civilian rule beginning 1990 at the State level. The Local Governments as third tier of government began its own experiment without political parties in January of 1987. The final phase, which culminates in 1992, will signal the Third Republic.

This paper posits that democracy in the Third Republic and beyond will only make sense if those who produce the wealth of the country own and control state power. The paper demonstrates that genuine democracy must be located within the rubrics of material production. The paper is divided thus: following this introduction, part I examines the conceptual framework and Nigerian democracy. In part II, we examine democracy in the Third Republic and how it can be achieved. Recommendations and conclusion of the paper are presented in part III.



# NIGERIA Development or Underdevelopment



(Selected Seminal papers)

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## PART 1

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

The Greek philosophers seem to be the first in recorded history to give philosophical foundation to democratic model. They had argued that the state existed for the sake of the individual, not the other way round. Zeno of Cyprus decades before Christ argues that man was a reflection of the divine since man possesses reason. The political writer of the renaissance and the Enlightenment supported such conviction that the individual does not heed to a blind follower but can join in the governing process. Therefore, the individual through his participation can protect himself against tyrannical or inept leaders without destabilizing society.

In recent times, democracy is often used to describe countries with capitalist mode of production. According to one writer, Britain, the USA, Belgium, and India, ... all have in common a 'temperate' degree of diffusion of power, a balanced combination of freedom and social control, and through their constitution rules and the prevailing political ethos they uphold and safeguard all six opportunities which are so essential to individual freedom. Their political systems are distinctly democratic" (Kousoulas, 1971, p. 50). Our framework differs completely from this notion.

Democracy, which means the rule of the majority over the minority, the equality of all citizens, their rights and freedoms must be located within a particular social formation. *Democracy connotes a form of state and a form of the organization of society's political and economic life.* Democracy must be understood historically as society moves from one mode of production to another. Democracy must be dissected and its qualitiveness highlighted from one social formation to another. Consequently, democracy under slavery is different from under feudalism. Furthermore, democracy under capitalism cannot be the same as democracy under socialism. A higher form of social formation represents sine quanon a higher form of democracy.

There, bourgeois democracy played a progressive role since freedom of the individual and formal equality of citizens were first proclaimed in the early period of capitalism. It put an end to feudal privileges and peasants dependence on the landowners. The

bourgeoisie (the ruling class under capitalism) established a constitutional basis for the working people's struggle for their political and socio-economic rights and freedoms. It created parliament and introduced universal suffrage, local government and court by jury. Nonetheless, it had severe limitation because the workers still exploited under capitalist relations. Consequently, democracy under capitalism is not genuine. It is the rule over the majority instead of the rule of the majority. Any social formation where the worker is no longer exploited represents a higher form of democracy. We have said that democracy means a form of state. Our definition of a state follows that of Engels:

*The State is therefore by no means a power imposed on the society from the outside; just as little it is 'the reality of the moral ideals', as Hegel asserted'. Rather, it is product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled with an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests may not consume themselves and the society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society becomes necessary, whose purpose is to moderate the conflict, and keep it within the bound of 'order'; and this power arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly separating itself from it, is the state". (Engels, 1975, p. 229).*

From the above, it is clear that the state is a manifestation of class antagonism. The state represents the rule or domination of one class against another. The state does not reflect a consensus of opinions. Class is used here in the Leninist sense as a group of people occupying a definite rule in a particular mode of production (Lenin, 1977, p. 172).



The State under capitalism is the rule of new privileged people who have appropriated the surplus value of the worker. It is the rules of the minority over the majority because the minorities own and control the economy. Based on our framework, private ownership and control of the means of production - a major element under capitalism is inconsistent with the theory and practice of genuine or true democracy. It is precisely for this reason that under capitalism workers and other oppressed groups continue to struggle for democratic rights like the right to education; to employment, etc (Ekpo, 1986b).

Democracy under Socialism is higher than the Democracy under capitalism because the former 'abolishes' private ownership and control of the means of production. Democracy under socialism centers on the principle of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism "implies an indissoluble dialectical unity between centralism and the broad independence of the people in the elaboration and adoption of decision and in the methods of carrying out this decisions and settling matters within their competence" (Topornin and Machulsky, 1974, p.66).

The state under socialist democracy is the working class in power, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, since the working class are in majority than those ruling in their interest represents the rule of the majority over the minority. To enjoy such democracy, the working must transform itself into the ruling and take control of the state power and run the state in its interest and that of other oppressed classes. (Lenin, 1971, p.23).

The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the highest form of democracy. Taking state power, the ruling class, now workers must begin to construct socialism - workers state - every aspect of the new state must reflect democratic centralism. However, since exploitation has been abolished, the class relationship is no longer antagonistic. Hence, the construction and maturity of socialism ensures the 'withering away' of the state. It is the proletarian state that 'withers' away as classless society approaches. Since democracy is also state, its disappears when the state disappears.

It is apparent from the above discourse that our framework is Marxist.

## **DEMOCRACY AND THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

From our framework, it is clear that Nigeria has never experienced democracy. After political independence in 1960, the country continued to experiment the capitalist model of development. The economic, political and social programmes and strategies of development were highly influenced on how Nigerian ruling class perceived development and underdevelopment.

The style of governance followed the Westminster model -it never reflected the experiences of people that were once colonized. The nationalists who had mobilized Nigerians against British colonial rule now began to mobilize them on the basis of tribalism. The class in power then used tribalism (ethnicity) to divide the populace. The existing major political parties have ethnic bases. For example, Ibos, the Action Group (AG) by Yorubas and the NPC mainly supported the NCNC by Hausas. Leaders of these parties continuously resorted to ethnic sentiments and support. Six years after independence, the plight of most Nigerians showed no meaningful improvement. On the contrary, the other forms of moral decadence reigned supreme.

Economically, the country remained a neo-colony. The Nigerian economy had already been integrated into the world capitalist system as a supplier of raw materials. All companies in the country were either owned by foreigners or by Kanches of multinationals. The ruling class was essentially a comprador and/ or lumpen class. The ruling class in Nigeria served as middlemen commission agents - for multinationals. Hence, Nigeria's capitalism was not only dependent but also peripherized. A system that was politically and economically controlled by a few rich Nigerians in collaboration with multinationals and other imperialist organizations cannot be said to be democratic.

Right up to the first military intervention in 1966, the means of production in Nigeria were owned and controlled by foreign companies. Nigerians were the producers of surplus value but never took part in the decision on how the surplus should be shared. Popular organizations like students, etc. were repressed. Trade Unions were under surveillance. The police on orders of the class in power constantly harassed progressive intellectuals. The 1963-64 general strike is evidence of how the state suppressed the views and



demands of workers. Peasants were highly exploited. Agricultural products like cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, etc provided the economy the much-needed foreign exchange. Through the various marketing boards at that time, government was able to generate funds for development purposes. However, where the crops came from remained underdeveloped - civilian rule cannot be equated to a democratic government.

The intervention by the military in 1966 did not change the country's reality. This is so because the social formation remained the same. The military regime can never be described anywhere as democratic. On the economic sphere, despite the three year civil war, the then government of General Yakubu Gowon got a windfall from petroleum. As it is characteristic of any system with intense primitive accumulation, the petroleum wind-fall meant more money for the Nigerian ruling class and their cohorts. The Nigerian masses remained poor when everything is considered.

Except for the petroleum industry and other publicly owned companies, the means of production remained in the hands of rich Nigerians, foreigners and multinational corporations. Public ownership of utilities like NEPA, Railways, etc was a continuation of the colonial policy rather than a policy initiative. At least, from 1960 up to the 1979-1984, the ruling class made no attempts to auction publicly owned companies. A publicly owned company gives a Nigerian some sense of belonging - some pride that he/ she collectively owns something in the country.

The residential form of government during the period 1979 - 1983 made no difference. Capitalism continued and the drive to accumulate was even higher. The State created through contract awards, real estate merchandizing and outright looting of the treasury more millionaires. Political armed robbers siphoned the wealth produced by the workers and peasants of Nigeria abroad. Workers went without salaries for months and in some states for years - this by no means cannot be labelled democracy. The wealth of workers and peasants went into debt servicing, importing and wetting the consumption appetite of the ruling class. At the end of the day, the treasury was empty. Democracy even in the bourgeois sense lost another chance.

The military burst in for the third time - the Buhari- Idiagbon

regime. The usual reasons for intervention were given one was to restore dignity to the Nigerian who has suffered from poverty, misery, unemployment, lack of health care, etc. Some people criticized the regime as being repressive. Decrees were promulgated to curb criticisms, etc. In August, 1984, another military coup. This one promised to pursue human rights and put the economy in a path of recovery. Please note that none of the regimes including that of 1960 ever questioned the type of social formation. They took it as given and then proceeded to change the situation. They were concerned with the symptoms not the cause.

In terms of democracy, the present administration has a bad track. The IMF debate, the report of the Political Bureau, the proscription of the NLC, the Proscription of ASSU, etc show a mockery of the regime's human right policy. It must however be stressed that military regimes are never democratic so one should not be surprised about the posture of this administration. It is precisely for this reason that this writer sees the present regime as doing what it ought to do - protecting its class. Policies never drop from the air, rather they are in place because a class benefits from such policies. A good example is the Structural Adjustment Programme, the debt-equity swap, privatization, etc. These policies and programmes work very fine for the class in power - the gains of SAP are not for everyone but for those who have political power and those who share the same ideology with them.

It is true that Nigeria has never tested democracy in the true sense of the concept. Our argument is that capitalism is undemocratic because a few who own wealth not because of hardwork rule over the majority. The problem of democracy in Nigeria is not because the military has ruled for almost eighteen years the problem must be located in the capitalist mode of production. A mode of production that believes strongly in self-interest first, profit at expense of human beings, and where labour power becomes a commodity to be bought and sold by the capitalists. A mode of production that cannot guarantee the right to life - one feature of capitalism is permanent unemployment.

The present administration has set in motion a transition programme towards a return to civilian rule. That civilian rule has been labelled and rightly so the Third Republic. How can



democracy be guaranteed in the Third Republic? It is to these questions and others that we now focus our attention.

## PART II

### THE THIRD REPUBLIC: WHO SHOULD RULE?

Democracy does not necessarily imply the competition of political parties for power. This is so because competition may not be fair given the various variables influencing the political power matrix. In the Nigerian context, all those individuals and their parties that have blundered the country in the last twenty-eight years must not be given a chance in the Third Republic.

Participants in the first two experiments especially those found guilty by various tribunals remain unpunished. It is therefore very unfair to give them a place in the Third Republic. Fortunately, the present administration has a ban on most of the former politicians.

The working people of Nigeria have never really participated in politics as a group. There have been some attempts in the past to form workers' parties but none could be called a party in the strict sense. Nigerian workers, peasants, artisans, progressive businessmen, progressive intellectuals, the unemployed and other patriots must rule the Third Republic. The control and ownership of State power by those who represent the generality of Nigerians will represent one of the highest reflections of democracy.

In other words those who have a stake in Nigeria ought to rule. Presently, genuine Nigerian industrialists cannot achieve their objectives due to the Structural Adjustment Programme. SAP favours those whose interest lie with imperialism. For such Nigerians, the issue is not what is good for Nigerians but how they can enrich their pockets by further accumulation. It follows therefore that such a group, which is very few in number will continue to mortgage the country to imperialism - this in itself is not genuine democracy.

The working people in power will bring about genuine democracy. In the economic sphere of social life, the main criteria of genuine democracy include:

- (i) the absence of exploitation of man by man and ensured by the abolition of private ownership and control of the means of

- production;
  - (ii) the transformation of the working people into the sovereign master of all the wealth of the country,
  - (iii) the right of the citizen to work and be catered for in the event of sickness and old age; and
  - (iv) the creative involvement on a mass scale of the working people in improving the economy and in achieving more efficient results in production - this is the basis for a steady rise in the living and cultural standards of the people.
  - (v) the above can come about only through a workers controlled social formation.
- The above criteria are diametrically opposed to a capitalist mode of production.

#### *How can Workers' Rule be Achieved:*

In a general sense workers rule in Nigeria is inevitable given the dialectics of the situation. However, it is important that the process of workers seizure of power be accelerated. Workers rule could come about either through election victory or revolution. The first option is not an easy one but it is possible as it happened in Chile. The second option, that is, revolution needs the experiences of parliamentary struggle.

In Nigeria, labour has not really participated in politics in terms of having their own political party. It is true that in 1931 and 1964 some form of labour party had existed but such a formation was not mass enough (Ananaba 1969). The Nigerian workers, peasants, artisans, etc have always become members of one party or another.

For the Third Republic, it is important that a Labour Party be formed by labour and other oppressed groups. The party will openly contest elections and at least place concretely the plight of workers on the agenda. The formation of a party of labour and its active participation in politics may not guarantee victory at the polls. After all, elections in a primitive and developing capitalist system like Nigeria is never free and fair but full of manipulations of the electoral process by the wealthy. The point being made here is that at least for the first time workers will take part openly in party politics. Workers will articulate their demands and their perception as to how the country should proceed.



The type of scenario just described may not be revolutionary but revolutionaries will emerge through such parliamentary experiences. If the oppressed convinces itself that manipulations were used in forestalling their victory at the polls they will concretely look for other methods of coming to power. It is not here being suggested that a party of labour should be formed only to contest the elections up to 1992. A labour party must be a permanent formation with the objective of continuous and persistent struggle until political power is wrested from those who have destroyed Nigeria.

There should be no illusions that a party of workers or labour will emanate without struggle. No class gives up privileges without struggle. Consequently, the proposed labour party of Nigeria can only be made a reality through committed struggle by all those interested in the vast majority of Nigerians taking active part in party politics. It is through this approach that the issue of democracy in the Third Republic can even be discussed.

### PART III

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Based on the above analyses we recommend the following:*

1. All popular organizations - student movements, youths, women, etc be mobilized into forming a mass labour party.
2. Progressive intellectuals, progressive businessmen, genuine industrialists and other patriots must be members of the proposed labour party.
3. In order to begin to shape the direction of future democracy in the country, it is important that the present administration implements the following:
  - a. revise upward the wages of workers;
  - b. subsidize peasant farmers in order to enhance productivity;
  - c. halt the deteriorating value of the Nigeria currency;
  - d. stop privatization of publicly owned companies;
  - e. lift the ban on ASUU and other organizations;
  - f. ensure that our education and health systems meet minimum standards;
  - g. improve on provision of basic needs to Nigerians;

- h. re-assess the debt situation;
  - i. the debt equity swap policy ought to be pursued with caution.
4. A labour party in Nigeria must be established. The party must consist of workers, peasants, youths, students, women, progressives, businessmen, patriots etc. The aims of the party will be to capture state power and run it in the interest of those who produce wealth.
  5. The present administration must register parties on ideological lines- this is one way of ensuring democracy.

#### CONCLUSION

The paper examined democracy in the Third Republic and beyond. The contention of the paper is that democracy makes sense if those who produce surplus value control state power. This means the vast majority of citizens will take part in the distribution and exchange of goods and services produced by them. Furthermore, the producers of wealth will participate in the administration of the system.

The concepts of democracy and state were explained from two contending schools of thought and the author did maintain that democracy must be located within a given mode of production for it to make sense. Perceived this way, a socialist mode of production represents a higher form of democracy.

A brief incursion into the Nigerian past revealed that previous governments have been run by those whose interest were in amassing wealth for themselves at the expense of the Nigerian polity. Also, these few Nigerians and their cohort were interested in satisfying imperialism in order to further accumulate wealth. It was stressed that previous civilian regimes and their military counterparts represented one and the same thing in the sense that the social formation under which they operated was never altered.

Consequently, democracy can only be genuine in the Third Republic and Beyond if labour rules over capital. One way of achieving this is to ensure that all oppressed groups in the country constitute themselves into a political party and fight for the control and ownership of state power. If the Nigerian nation must continue in the interest of those who toil and produce the country's wealth

then such a party should be registered. The consequences of not registering a labour party are beyond the scope of this paper.