Opinion

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The imperative of 'people's manifesto'

By Edwin Madunagu

unity of Left forces.

N the 20 months since I wrote "Drafting a people's manifesto" and "Further notes on the people's manifesto" (Feb. ruary/March, 2018), a sufficient number of significant things have happened and are happening in our country, Nigeria, in the Nigerian Left, to the Nigerian Left and in the world to raise the level of the urgency of the broad suggestion I alternately called "draft" and "notes". The use of these terms to describe my attempt was a cautious way of indicating that I was not, and could not be publishing a manifesto on behalf of the Nigerian Left. I could only suggest, propose and urge-not as a detached outsider, but as an active insider.

One possible manner of appearance of an authentic "people's manifesto" is clear to me and I expressed it in my piece, "Preliminary notes on RevolutionNow" (August 15, 2019). What I said then can be re-stated, perhaps more clearly: Variants of RevolutionNow (August 5, 2019) may be attempted again and again until a particular attempt initiates a popular revolt which will simultaneously produce an authentic "people's manifesto" and a substantial and effective

This follow-up piece is also not a manifesto, nor can it be. And it is not a call for revolution. The preceding paragraph is a statement of possibility informed by history and experience: distant, recent and current. Having said this we should also quickly add and emphasise that no serious Left formation or serious Left programme can be based - solely or even substantially - on the possibility of popular political eruptions. You only have to recognize that possibility of spontaneous revolts while struggling, campaigning, mobilizing and organizing. History and experience have sufficiently shown us that the absence of this recognition of possibility and therefore, the need for "sideline" prepara-

Most of the present seemingly chronic and insurmountable obstacles in the path of Left unity will evaporate at a revolutionary conjuncture we may not be able to predict. The "manifesto of the Nigerian people", or the "people's

tions for it-is the dominant reason for "betrayals" and "hi-

jackings" of popular political upheavals when they occur.

Put differently, "betrayals" and "hijackings" of popular re-

volts are indicators of the level of organization of the Left.

manifesto", as indicated in an earlier piece, and now being strengthened, has a double character or two forms. In the first place, it is a Nigerian Left's manifesto in the ordinary sense of the term, "manifesto": a "public declaration of intentions, motives or views", of what it intends to do, at the

it is a Nigerian People's Charter of Demands presented to the of the Nigerian masses acting directly (that is, sponta-Nigerian state by the Nigerian Left, in the name of the Niger neously), and as mobilized through their popular - demoian people (popular masses). Hence the people's manifesto, cratic formations and coordinated by the Nigerian Left. But, or distillations from it, can be used for elections as (campaign then, who or what is the Nigerian Left? What are its anplatform) and for general popular struggle. History shows us tecedents and credentials? How does it intend to carry out that this dual character of the "people's manifesto" lies at the its promise? How is its message, together with the descriproots of its popular acceptance, its power and its resilience. tion of the reality on which it is based, different from what These are primary tests of a "people's manifesto".

The events or "things" to which I referred in the opening sentence of this piece include Elections 2019 and the recent Supreme Court's effective "closure" of the exercise; the steady festo". But before they are answered in the manifesto the decline of the state of the country's physical infrastructure; the steady rise in the levels of unemployment, poverty and dition for the former. And if it cannot answer anyone of "insecurity"; the steady increase of the burden of living and them convincingly to itself, then it has to return to the reproducing life imposed by the Nigerian state on the masses drawing board. And in returning to the drawing board, the of the Nigerian people; intensifying violent struggles within identified three forms of struggle (direct, popular-democthe ruling class for the control of political power and the eco- ratic and Left) and their coordination should be more thornomic surpluses extracted from the labour of the working oughly interrogated. And remember: "Without a guiding and toiling masses-struggles in which the same masses are organisaton the energy of the masses would dissipate like foot-soldiers and primary victims; and, generally, the steady steam not enclosed in a pistonbox. But, nevertheless, what decline of the quality of life of the broad masses of the Niger-moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam". ian people - the "minimum wage" and its politics notwith- Since the "people's manifesto" will be a formal document standing.

The significant events of the last 20 months also include tents". The following six-point structure is an illustration: the successful holding of a Conference of Marxism - result- Who are the Nigerian Left? What country do Nigerian peoing, among other things, in the establishment of a vibrant ple now have?; What country do Nigerian people desire and discussion platform for Marxists. This came as a qualitative deserve to have?; For a popular-democratic Nigeria: How addition to older but not-too-vibrant platforms for socialists the desirable will become the realizable; immediate steps and Leftists. Also appearing as a significant event is Revoluto be taken on coming to power or office; and Exhortation tion Now and the current trial of its leader and a number of on the essential continuity of the struggle until victory, and its lead partisans; the increasing fascist encroachment on the beyond victory. Nigerian people's civil and democratic rights; the appearance of new popular-democratic platforms with credible leader- 10 months ago: "The next qualitative step (for the Nigerian ships-at the same time as the appearance of potentially will- Left) is not the formation of new parties or groups, or reing foot soldiers of full-scale fascism.

Finally, the significant events include the current world-wide the establishment of a Centre for coordination, ideological popular protests in virtually all the continents and regions education, research, documentation and publicity." But of the world. Here it is unnecessarily scholastic to start clast two questions now emerge: Can there be more than one sifying the protests as "revolutionary", "democratic", "pro- Coordinating Centre? Yes, there can be. But I believe that gressive", "reactionarty", etc. The first task is to determine the Nigerian Left is tired of the futility of multiplicity of forwhether a protest is popular or not. Then identify and determations. How many successful conferences on Marxism or mine the "specific weight" of each ideological tendency in similar efforts have we had in the last decade? And, can be the protest. For the Left, that is where the lessons reside. Do there be more than one "people's manifesto"? Yes, there can not expect a "pure" protest.

point in history should be that the various negative and unthe Nigerian Left history now demands a qualitative step desirable aspects of Nigeria's current reality - as partially forward - to save the nation.

very least, if it comes to power or office. In the second place, sketched above-can be arrested and reversed by the efforts the masses have been hearing over the years, since inde-

pendence, from regime to regime?

These questions must be answered in the "people's mani-Nigerian Left must answer them to itself. The latter is a con-

it has to be appropriately structured, with a "table of con-

So, what should be done? I recall what I proposed about newed attempts to register those already in existence, but be. But how many Left declarations and platforms have we The central message of the "people's manifesto" at this had in the last decade and how many have survived? From