

# Notes on engaging Nigeria's ruling class

By Edwin Madunagu

NIGERIA'S ruling class has presented the nation with a number of issues around which the Nigerian Left can build an agenda of political engagement for the year 2020, or which, to use an old journalistic expression, the Left can use as "pegs" to construct an agenda of close and integrated engagement with the rulers for the year 2020 and beyond. The rulers of Nigeria regularly "oblige" us in this way.

This time around the issues on the table and on display include: the movement of Nigeria's presidency in 2023; the politics generated by the Western Nigeria Security Network—codenamed "Operation Amotekun"; the 50th anniversary of the end of the Civil War; and the integrity and status of the electoral process in the struggle for political power. To these four issues we may now add: the enduring and deteriorating human condition in Nigeria; and the permanent issue: the need for the class struggle of the working and toiling people against exploitation and oppression to continue in all circumstances created by the ruling class.

As a preliminary issue, we may pose this double question: Who are the Nigerian Left and what do they want? This question is necessary, at this historical juncture, in this age of Internet, Fake News and high-tech Infiltration, for self-clarification, proper self-identification, politically useful separation of allies and potential allies from opponents and adversaries and for what "modern" social work and its lexicon have taught us to call "focusing". The ancillary question of what aspects of this double-question should be asked and debated openly and publicly and those to be treated privately—or even secretly—is a practical one that should be left like that. The ruling class and the state know, worship and practise this art of "separation" very well.

The Nigerian Left may be defined and identified as an aggregate of Nigeria's revolu-

tionary Marxists, revolutionary socialists and the large non-homogeneous group that may together be described as radical pro-people democrats. I propose that an adherent of any ideological or political tendency that cannot find accommodation in the family sketched above may, indeed, be a potential ally, but she or he cannot be described as belonging in the Nigerian Left. In particular, any Nigerian "progressive" that cannot, in addition, be described as a radical pro-people democrat cannot be a Nigerian Leftist in this period. What Nigerian Leftists want is implicit in the first sentence of this paragraph: Popular Power, Popular Democracy, Socialism.

For "completeness" and avoidance of doubt, a progressive in politics has been generally and safely described long ago by a Nigerian Leftist as anyone who "believes in the possibility and desirability of progress" where progress is identified as "the socio-economic and moral improvement of the human condition which predicates on a high optimism about the human nature." Such a Nigerian may indeed be a good person. But the point I am making here is that anyone answering to this description of a Nigerian progressive but who cannot be politically described as a pro-people radical democrat cannot be a Nigerian Leftist in this particularly bad state of the Nigerian masses and the Nigerian nation.

Going back to the six issues listed above, we note that the first four are issues generated, formulated and presented to the nation by the ruling class in the course of their internal struggle for power, or for favourable balance of power or for hegemony. The last two issues, and similar ones, on the other hand, are those generated and continuously reproduced and presented by Nigeria's ruling class, as a ruling class, in the course of their rule and administration. The issues are tied up with and inseparable from the class interests of the ruling class. Put differently, the suffering of the masses spring from the rulers' pursuit of their class interests, a continuous and life-saving engagement for them. The struggle against it, practically and

ideologically, must therefore be permanent. The Nigerian Left cannot conjure issues from the clouds. It should start from what is concretely given, and proceed from there.

An enduring elementary political lesson—but one that, for its ordinariness and simplicity, is often taken for granted—is that to seriously and effectively engage the Nigerian ruling class, we have to continuously observe and study it—not in its "idleness" but in its activity, including its politics. It is this observation—and—study that leads us to establish another elementary fact, namely, that the Nigerian ruling class is not homogeneous, that it is divided into segments, groupings, factions, tendencies and, finally, political forces and power blocs.

I have written on the last category—political forces and power blocs—for at least 25 years, and my knowledge and position on the subject have developed over the years. This time around I shall try to avoid "disquisitions," except to make five points. One: Power blocs and political forces, in the context of my writings, are groupings in the Nigerian ruling class, not from outside of it. Two: The reality of power blocs transcends the current electoral divisions into APC, PDP, etc. Three: All power blocs are political forces; but not all political forces are power blocs. Four: Power blocs and political forces are not exclusively regional, ethnic or religious groupings; but they have strong regional and ethnic and, sometimes religious components or overtones. And finally, the critical difference: Five: Power blocs are those political forces that are capable of pushing for power or for retention of power (not just office) in Nigeria as a whole.

In the face of these divisions in Nigeria's ruling class, in addition to the formal electoral divisions, it is the task of the Nigerian Left to strive to credibly claim and demonstrate that it is the only ideological and political movement against exploitation and oppression and for genuine democracy and national unity. And to do this is to strive to

show that all the ruling class formations and tendencies have certain common attributes that are fundamentally anti-democratic, anti-people and self-serving.

We may now, by means of posing questions, attempt to illustrate our propositions: What political forces are currently perceived as the decisive forces in the debate on the movement of the presidency in 2023? Are they APC or PDP forces, or satellite forces, or Left forces? Or, are they simply ethnic forces? Who are the dominant forces in the "controversy" over "Operation Amotekun"? Are they APC or PDP forces? Or, are they simply ethnic forces? Which of the well-known ruling class' positions on "Restructuring" is unconditionally supportable by the Nigerian Left? Which strategic political demand—the presidency, restructuring, referendum, etc.—in the South East segment of Nigeria's ruling class is unconditionally supportable by the Nigerian Left?

The Nigerian Left must be able to answer that none of the ruling class' positions on the current major issues before the nation is unconditionally supportable because all of them leave out the class question, the popular-democratic question and the specific interests of the working and toiling masses of Nigeria. On the other hand, are the questions and controversies trivial? Are they irrelevant? If they are neither trivial nor irrelevant, does the fact that they have attracted responses from the masses, or even from Left elements, indicate a "line of march" to us? If the Marxist segment of the Nigerian Left cannot answer these questions without equivocation, then we should all go back to the theory of hegemony.

In conclusion, I propose that only the Nigerian Left can answer the questions posed above without equivocation and then re-pose current questions, including those of "Movement of the presidency in 2023", "Operation Amotekun", "Restructuring", "National Security", etc, in the interest of the masses and in the true interest of the nation.