

Opinion

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Reorganising Nigeria's Left politics

By Edwin Madunagu

There is a contradiction between an enduring desire of the Nigerian Left (the aggregate of Nigerian Marxists, socialists and fragments of radical democrats), on the one hand, and the actual history of Nigeria's Left politics on the other. That contradiction can be stated like this: Nigerian Leftists have always hoped to found a substantial and respectable pan-Nigerian organization that is capable of permanently and continuously coordinating their revolutionary strategies and popular-democratic struggles regardless of the electoral agenda, time-tables and timelines presented to the nation by Nigeria's ruling class and its governments. But what we have had in practice is that the trajectory (rise and decline) of Left politics and organization in our country since the Second Republic seems to mirror the trajectory of our national politics (especially electoral contests) which, as we all know, has largely been determined and dominated by the ruling class.

It is not necessary in this article to attempt to demonstrate the preceding proposition in any historical detail. This will derail the focus of the article. It is sufficient for our purpose to proceed from the fact that the proposition is true *prima facie*. All that the Nigerian Left needs to do now is to resolve, once again, to break with this heritage of tying the tempo of its politics and organization to the tempo of ruling class politics, and then rise to realize its historically-determined needs and possibilities. That is the central concern of this piece.

Having said this, it has to be recognized, and we do recognize and proclaim that the Nigerian Left has grown not only in size but also in quality in the last five years. It has grown in diversity, in creativity, in perspective, and in audacity. The most significant elements of the qualitative change have been brought about by the creative employment of the rapidly developing modern communication technology in popular-democratic struggle, organization, campaign and advocacy. More concretely, the elements of the Niger-

ian Left's qualitative change include the establishment and engagement of popular-democratic, Left-populist and class-specific platforms of education, research, information, discussion and debate, sharp exchanges and, most significantly, mobilization for political interventions - qualitatively different from the NGO phenomenon, though partly originating in it. These platforms have continued to draw in Nigerian professionals of both sexes and other strata of the middle class. Counted among the platforms are Nigerian Socialists, Conference on Marxism, Friends of Revolution (FOR), Alliance on Surviving COVID-19 and Beyond (ASCAB) and several others that are either unknown or are inappropriate for mention in this medium. It is also heart-warming and inspiring to note that the socialist and popular-democratic advocacy of the Nigerian Left in the last five years has become clearer, bolder and more confident in its discussion of feminism, the national question, secularity of the state, the critical placement of the working class, the wide and elastic horizon of democracy and human rights and revolutionary internationalism. Nigerian Left's anti-poverty and anti-corruption struggles have become more class-conscious. What remains to be done in this sphere of rising maturity is for the Nigerian Left to sharpen its perception of political power as a realizable strategic objective.

The question now is: How can the Nigerian Left, having recorded the qualitative and quantitative advances described in the preceding paragraphs, establish a framework to coordinate this first set of advances, thus helping to realize their combined revolutionary potentials? In answer, we can say that there are, at least, three possible strategies. We shall quickly dispose of the first two strategies which are, in fact, "reminders", and then proceed to the third which, though not new, has not been in active consideration for a long time.

The first possible strategy is this: Let a number of Nigerian revolutionary socialists, hopefully with some Marxists, select themselves, draft a People's Manifesto for the Nigerian Left, establish an interim Coordi-

nating Centre for the Nigerian Left, draft an agenda for the first meeting of this "New Effort" (to be attended by comrades carefully selected by them), draft an agenda for such a meeting, summon it and direct it. At the conclusion of the meeting, with the setting up of an interim leadership, the original group is dissolved, having concluded its mission.

The second possible strategy is embodied in the following excerpt from my article, "Preliminary notes on RevolutionNow" (August 15, 2019): "If Nigeria survives long enough from the current battering of the country's ruling class, variants of what was attempted on August 5, 2019 may be attempted again and again until a spark leads to a national conflagration or a successful popular revolution resulting from a better conceived, planned and executed strategy. Such a successful popular revolution will present to every Left entity - organization or individual - the choice of joining the revolution as an active participant, thereby ending this long stalemate".

Now, to the third possible strategy: About a month ago, a political formation, named the Nigerian Consultative Forum (NCF), announced its coming into being. The event was widely publicized in the print, online and social media. Going by its first public announcement, including its "mission statement" and the list of its initiators (actual and assumed) one can say, tentatively, that the formation is respectable, reformist and patriotic. But it is not Left, by any stretch.

One of the names invoked, without notice or consultation, in the birth announcement of NCF was Comrade Femi Falana, a well-known Nigerian Leftist, frontline human rights lawyer and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). After seeing the announcement, Comrade Falana politely and in a responsible manner, explained that he was neither consulted nor notified before the announcement. He acknowledged the efforts and sincerity of the initiators but politely declined membership.

After this introductory comment, Comrade Falana went to the critical point: "I

wish to add that there are several efforts I have been involved lately and I believe that there is a growing perspective that all efforts should be harmonized for maximum impact. At the appropriate time, we shall come before Nigerians to present the new platform which would be predicated upon pro-masses-oriented and anti-poverty programme, and hopefully, the founders of the new initiative will be proud not to be left out".

First, a clarification: Historically, politically and ideologically, it is not wrong, in an absolute sense, to invoke the names of popular and respected personages in making important political interventions in national crises or revolutionary situations. The word "important" should be defined here as intended to save "the nation" or a "political entity" or even an "idea". But whoever is making such an "invocation" (without consultation or notice) is assuming a grave responsibility which must be based at least on honesty and sufficient knowledge of the invoked. Once these conditions, deliberately loaded, are satisfied, a good name can be invoked as freely as we breathe the air.

Now to the substantive and critical questions. They are also rhetorical; so Comrade Falana is not obliged to start answering them: Will the "new initiative" envisaged by Comrade Falana in his statement be Left, Centrist or Right? I rule out the Right because I have known and followed Falana for 40 years, since 1980. If Left or Centrist, will Marxists and revolutionary socialists go into it as individuals or as a disciplined group? If as a group what level of relative-independence will such a group seek for itself in the formation?

Presented above are three alternative strategies for the Nigerian Left to make a new qualitative leap in its national politics and organization. My modest objective here has been to simply present them as clearly as possible and not to infer whether I am anticipating a revolution or targeting electoral politics - or 2023, for that matter. Beyond this, I may suggest that the three strategies are not mutually exclusive. By this I mean that the breakthrough that we seek may occur as a combination of two or all the three alternatives.