

DEMOCRACY in Nigeria is a war to be won. It is better understood as progress in people's power against a host of enemies. I shall merely mention these enemies and their anti-democratic emanations. The first is Uncle Tomism. The British colonial power managed the granting of Nigerian independence in such a way that those who have ruled are lackeys of imperialism. The masses of Nigeria want to liberate themselves from imperialism, and the imperialists know it. Consequently, the 'leaders' favoured by imperialists (that is, foreign big investors in Nigeria and their home government backers) must be lackeys that can maintain the 'peace' of the graveyard in Nigeria while the vultures gore and gorge.

The second enemy is traditional autocracy. In many parts of Nigeria, chieftaincy is associated with autocracy. Once a chief desires something, the people must do it obediently. What is wanted by this tradition is obedience or obsequiousness which is mistaken for loyalty, discipline or even love. Independence, criticism and any will of the people contrary to the chief's preference is regarded as deviant or rebellious. We see people all over Nigeria who throw their weights about and think they have become demigods, having been named chiefs. If any chief happens, indeed, to be democratic, he is so by personal choice and not as a part of the tradition.

The third enemy is the colonial heritage. Colonialism left behind a large element of authoritarianism in the country. Colonialists also demanded not reasoning or argument but Nigerian public vocabulary by the Shagari Administration. The obscurantist traditionalists, conservatives and

'good' colonial servants who dominated Shagari's party and government regarded every criticism, question asking or opposition as 'confrontation', that is, an act of rebellion.

The fourth enemy is the bureaucratisation of life. The colonial government left a fairly large administrative, police and judicial bureaucracy. The large government and private firms that dominate the modern and money-spinning sector are run by large bureaucracies. Since development in the country in all fields depends very much on these bureaucracies, their powers are very large. As the people are not well organised in any field, the bureaucracy behaves as if it has a right to please itself. It sees itself as the connoisseur of all that should be. This is especially so since representation of the people, the rule of law and justice are undermined by ethnicity, corruption and the illiteracy of the vast majority of the people.

The fifth enemy is militarism or military dictatorship. Out of 37 years of quasi-independence, 30 have been spent in military dictatorships. Nigerians who were born after the civil war have seen no civilian rule, for they were still children during the brief 1979-83 rule of Shagari. The result of such military bastardisation is the ascendancy of commandism everywhere. Even vice-chancellors in universities, noted for their tradition of splendid argumentation and debate, have degenerated into fascists. I regard secret cults in universities as one result of the unrelieved exposure of certain types of impressionable young people to a situation where one

Enemies of democracy

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can get away with an arbitrary secret conspiracy, force, dictation, personal ambition, lying and the capacity to grab, and where those who excel in these things expect to be looked upon or even glorified as 'leaders'.

The sixth enemy is ethnicity. Ethnicity implies a definition of 'the people' to exclude all except one's ethnic 'brothers'. It has always been easy to justify or excuse autocracy or discrimination against even the majority of citizens on the basis of ethnicity or racism. On the other hand, ethnicity or racism makes it difficult, if not impossible, for sufferers from autocracy to unite against it. For instance, the ethnic chauvinists in the south of Nigeria find it convenient to associate all the citizens from the north of Nigeria with the autocracy of even military regimes headed by someone from that part of the country instead of uniting with all democrats in Nigeria willing to oppose any autocracy. In fact, experience leads one to the conclusion that it is impossible for a chauvinist to be a genuine democrat.

Quite a heady and ubiquitous enemy of democracy is opportunism. With opportunism, one is ready to set aside all norms or conventions that safeguard or are likely to lead to democracy. We know that Nigeria today flares in the forest fire of opportunism. When politicians declare politics a game rather than a serious concern with the fate of the country or the people, when they pronounce it a dirty game to

excuse any filth one can pack into it, when men of affairs tout themselves as 'practical', and dismiss all principles contemptuously as 'theory', 'dealism' or day dreaming, when a military opportunist who has staged a successful *coup d'etat* blares like a god of thunder that what the country needs is not ideology but his rule, it is preposterous that any of them or any of their cohorts can in the next minute talk of wanting democracy. As for democracy, it is the realisation and sustenance of certain principles as primary. Democracy and opportunism go ill together.

With opportunism walks hand in hand its twin, personal ambition. Consider a Nigerian who turns his back on the tribulations of the people or lends a sycophantic hand to tyranny, hilariously casting all scruples to the winds in order to become a portmanteau Rockefeller while the people chafe. When he has become a rotten naira Goliath, he now suddenly surfaces as nothing other than a candidate for a presidency, governorship or local council chairmanship that can be bought with money. We ought to know that such a Nigerian is an enemy of democracy. Such ambitious merchant adventurers are the rule rather than the exception today in Nigeria. Of course, they proclaim themselves 'democrats'.

The next in line as an enemy of democracy is greed: greed for the power of wealth and the power of position. Greed is associated with monopolism. It is the opposite of fair sharing. The power of money or position is even disdainful of consultation with the 'crowd' who have

neither. Democracy, however, means fair sharing and consultation that recognise, as the United States Declaration of Independence put it in 1776, that "all men are created equal".

The ninth enemy of democracy is superficiality or mediocrity. Dictators and opportunists encourage superficiality, because they flourish best where no one can ask deep questions. Little wonder why in all regimes that are antagonistic to democracy, even while styling themselves 'democratic' or seeing themselves as transitions to democracy, organisations like Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) are in for perennial trouble. As already noted, it is not military men alone that demand nothing but obedience and compliance and see everything else as 'confrontation'. Last but not least enemy is corruption. With corruption, anti-democracy strides at ease wearing the mask of 'democracy'. Putrefying gifts and a vile hurricane of promises of position, money or other property sweep aside the real interests or presence of the people, subvert democratic constitutions, and tear up democratic rules of law.

Nigeria needs a massive, well-organised, sustained and well-oriented struggle for democracy, and this calls for such a struggle against its many enemies. One is a fool who thinks every civilian who hails 'democracy' is a democrat. It takes time to know a democrat. I can say firmly that Nigeria's ASUU is a genuinely democratic organisation because I have seen it in action from the inside over many years and in many situations of different kinds. Many so-called 'democrats' in Nigeria are frauds.

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