

Unpopular Essays

BASSEY EKPO BASSEY



I REMEMBER being at a meeting with an American Senator by the name of Dick Clark. There were a number of other Nigerians at that meeting, and some of them talked with enthusiasm of what Jimmy Carter who had been elected US president might do for Southern Africa and the world.

They reasoned with child-like innocence that since Carter was a democrat; since he was reputed to be a dutiful parishoner; with excellent recommendations from his days as a provincial politician, his approach to the affairs of a troubled world as president of the world's only democracy, was going to be sanctimonious. Nothing but sanctimonious.

I was not so sure. And my cynicism stemmed partly from a suspicion that Carter did not understand American politics as it affects the world.

In recent times, Carter has set about confirming that suspicion. Like his predecessor Woodrow Wilson, who lived at the turn of the century, Carter has made into a pet indulgence, the practice of declaring America a moral giant that is prepared to use its power to create a world after its image.

Apart from countries like South Korea which are adjudged crucial to U.S. interests, he has announced a reduction in aids to his country's appendages states for their violation of human rights at home. And he is always on about how human rights are being violated in the Soviet Union.

Is the Soviet Union guilty as charged? can America, by some stretch of the imagination be considered a moral society where human rights are given a chance?

As the tirades grow in intensity and threaten to trigger off another round of cold war, it is important that we look beyond the blanket—term of "human rights" and probe for its meaning in more comprehensible forms.

Our attempt to answer the question raised shall ignore the rhetorical and non-descript "Declaration of Human Rights" by the United Nations. Rather, we shall put the question to history and relate its verdict to contemporary practice.

The present day con-

ception of rights that are fundamental to man have their origins in the 16th and 17th centuries with the industrial revolution which swept through Europe and became a political force.

John Locke who emerged as the greatest defender of the "Glorious Revolution" in England lived in this period. And he

NO FREEDOM FOR THE MAJORITY

supplied the creed that echoes till this day. Locke's main concern was with "natural rights" which he listed as the rights "to life, liberty and property". To Locke, these rights were fundamental to man and so, could not be abolished.

His emphasis on "property" was consistent with the passion of the nascent commercial/industrialist class. Locke became the prophet of the "clan". Later Adam Smith spelt out Locke in more economic terms. And by the time David Ricardo and Jeremy Bentham had finished with them, the so called "natural rights", especially their rights to property, had immutable truth.

The American Declaration of Independence adequately acknowledged this fact. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created

equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

It has already been observed that the American Declaration did not mention the right to property. But that "omission" can only be explained in terms of a determination by Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration, not to appear to be copying Locke. Historical practice has confirmed that Jefferson's "pursuit of happiness" was a euphemism for "property". The change was in words, not on content.

With the concept of Rights, another "change," has since occurred. An attempt has been made to break the rights into "freedoms". And the list is rather extensive.

Nigeria's majority draft constitution has a total of 12 such "freedoms".

And their class nature is revealed by the explanation offered by the Nigerian draft. "Most of the fundamental rights are in a sense, natural rights vested in every individual and to which he is entitled without any obligation or duty on the part of the government to provide."

What I am saying is that in Carter's America and every other such country, freedom of expression does not exist for a majority of the population. The Fundamental Rights that are daily spouted by these countries are class concepts that are designed to grant respectability to exploitation both at home and abroad.

In the Soviet Union and elsewhere, a new civilisation has since emerged, the civilisation of socialism.

Socialism starts by offering realisable freedoms. Freedoms from hunger, from ignorance, from disease and so on. It is only after these have been consolidated that society can move in realistic terms toward the acquisition of the other freedoms.

Some of these secondary freedoms are already being realised in the Soviet Union. Cheap, decent and available public transport gives meaning to the "Freedom of Movement". These victories for human rights are the correct foundation for democracy.

Dr. Julius Nyerere testifies to this thought when he says: "We (in Tanzania) are seriously trying to build a democratic and socialist state. We seriously believe that we cannot be democratic without being socialist."

Tomorrow: Ray Ekpo's Column

In Memoriam

IN affectionate memory of our dearly beloved father and grandfather



CHIEF BASSEY ESSIEN UWATT who answered the great call two years ago on the 31st of March, 1975.

Yours was a worthy life and a shining example which shall ever be remembered.

The Almighty God called you for an equally worthy reward which this material world was too poor to give.

May you rest in perfect peace! Amen

A. R. UWATT
(for the entire family).

1977 World Health Day

THEME: CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATION

SLOGAN: IMMUNIZE AND PROTECT YOUR CHILD

QUIZ

THE below quiz is open to all primary and secondary school children throughout the Federation.

PLEASE TICK THE CORRECT STATEMENTS OR ANSWERS:

- The following diseases can be prevented by vaccination:—
 — Tuberculosis Yes () No. ()
 — Measles Yes () No. ()
 — Malaria Yes () No. ()
 — Poliomyelitis Yes () No. ()
 — Diarrhea Yes () No. ()
- Since 1970, no case of smallpox has been recorded in Nigeria.
 Yes () No. ()
- Several vaccinations such as diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus or smallpox and BCG, can be given at the same time. Yes () No. ()
 (b) They are safe and effective Yes () No. ()
- 7th of April is World Health Day. It is the day when Nigeria became a member of World Health Organization. Yes () No. ()
- Vaccinations are available at Health Centres, Maternal and Child Welfare Clinics, Chest Clinics and from Mobile Health Team. Yes () No. ()
- Once vaccinated against a disease, the person is protected 100% against the disease for life. Yes () No. ()

Ten winners (five from the Primary Schools and five from the Secondary Schools) will be selected and a prize of ₦10 (Ten Naira) will be posted to each of the winners.

All entries should be sent to:—

The Chief Federal Health Educator
Federal Health Education Unit
Onikan Health Centre
Lagos.

not later than Friday April, 22nd 1977.

DR J. A. LAOYE
Chief Federal Health Educator
for Permanent Secretary
Federal Ministry of Health
Lagos