

Unpopular Essays

BASSEY EKPO BASSEY



Professor Ayandele

A FRIEND of mine once wrote in a newspaper article that a people get the leadership they deserve. And I said in private discussion with him, that he was at once wrong and correct.

If what he was trying to convey was that a leader results from the dynamics of his social reality, he could not be more correct. For at every stage in the development of society, every trend, and indeed, every contending social force must have its leadership. If, on the other hand, he was trying to suggest that every formal leader results from the pace of social development achieved by the people he leads, then, my friend would be guilty of simple inspection. For it is a common human foible that here and there, one stumbles on a formal leader who does not appear to have recognised that the crowd has moved ahead of him.

Professor Emmanuel Ayankanni Ayandele, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calabar is one such leader. Long after the so-called educated elite had ceased being impressed by the power of the spoken word, the professor continues to make it his forte.

He is a man religiously given to powerful language. And the newspapers are rich with the torrents of the Professor's seasonal languages. But of all the language recorded in Ayandele's name over time, perhaps the most powerful was heard last week by members of the academic community over which he presides.

He talked about the Cross River State as "an atomistic society perpetually in conflict with itself". He talked about "irredeemable ignoramus, mischief makers and

enemies of the University of Calabar" to mean those academic staff of the university who have been leaking information to the press.

In earlier outbursts, he had characterised the educated elite as "despicable, conscienceless grabbers, demagogues and exploiters". And Western Education as "potentially, sociologically, a bomb of magato proportions".

Because he is an eloquent and impressive speaker, Professor Ayandele has problems applying moderation in speech and is manifestly impatient with less successful and less virtuous people.

But the learned professor also has problems in another direction, in his interpretation of history and society. When he complained that the Cross River State is experiencing an intractable ethnic crisis, characterised by "intense personal bikerings, envy, and disrespect for one another beyond my wits," he was articulating the frustration of an age when nobody appears to know anything.

Beyond this apparent bewilderment however, Professor Ayandele's statement was a confession of helplessness on the part of the majority of the country's academia, a threatened species whose authenticity and relevance is more than ever, being questioned.

The professor's complaint about ethnicity in the Cross River State raises the spectre of the monastic conception of the university as a secluded enclosure of learning, isolated from the bedlam of society. In a nightmarist negation of the contemporary concept of the university's place in society, Ayandele advised the public to hands-off his university and leave it free to

pursue research.

But what research? A research that does not include the ethnic problem of the state? Professor Ayandele is unrepentant in his understanding of the relation of formal education to society. His view on learning is stubbornly unprogressive, antiquated and ought to be consigned to the garbage cans of history.

Ayandele has stated this view before. . . in a clear unambiguous way. "A truly educated man" he said, "is that person who epitomises the attributes of a good man in a comprehensive

sense in the way so clearly analysed by the Ancient Greek philosophers. Related to our context, the good man is that person whose intellect is developed by the book learning he receives in the library or the laboratory, but at the same time has absorbed fully the scintillating values of the non-literary indigenous educational system. Surely, he is neither a truly educated person nor a good man who cannot demonstrate superiority over the unlettered in the practice of virtue".

The indigenous educated system Ayandele

talks about cannot be confused with the cultural content of education because, by his own conception (as explained elsewhere) it is merely, a reproduction of pedantic tradition which would best be allowed to die.

What is left of Ayandele's concept of education, therefore is a mere transmission of settled learning from teacher to pupil. That is, the recitation of the principles of "thermal dissociation", "history of the British Empire" "Displacement by Hydrogen," etc., by teachers for the benefit of students who must recount them for their degrees.

His endorsement of the Ancient Greek concept of learning, is to say

the least, criminal in the contemporary society. It is probably responsible for his stand-offish attitude to the ethnic problems of the Cross River State, and highlights the continuing conflict between two understandings of history.

For people like Ayandele, history is a mere recount of events and ideas, which is why his involvement with the ethnic crisis in the Cross River State stops with his exposure of the conflict.

An alternative understanding of history would enhance deeper involvement and less superficial comprehension of the ethnic problem Ayandele complains about. It would dictate to him that to analyse a social problem, one first of all must identify its source and then study the self-movement of the social whole.

Because he cannot come to terms with the second alternative he has further confused the state's ethnic problem by mystifying it. But why must a historian mystify a social problem? Or be mystified by it?

Namibia : Another Deceit?

ANOTHER impasse is the result of the recent, "decisive" round of the New York talks on Namibia to which the participating American, British, French, West German and Canadian heads of diplomatic corps invited their colleague R. Botha from South Africa and Sam Nujoma, SWAPO President.

On the eve of the talks the West's "comprehensive" and "compromise" plan for a Namibian settlement was made public. Even at first glance one can say that the new plan does not accord with the demands of the Namibian people to any greater degree than all the preceding ones. What is more, on a number of its items the Western powers have made more concessions to the South African racists who have illegally occupied that African territory. The plan provides, among other things, for the stay of South African troops in Namibia till the holding of Namibian elections and during the elections. Thus, the plan has

again ignored the opinion of SWAPO, supported by the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations. South African troops must be withdrawn unconditionally as no genuinely free elections are possible in their presence.

South Africa needs its troops in Namibia to terrorize the Namibians and force them to vote for the puppets from the so-called democratic alliance. Judging by the fact that the West keeps putting the question of troops on the agenda of the talks, one can arrive at a logical conclusion that it is no less interested in the presence of the South African troops in Namibia than Pretoria itself.

Against this background one can only hail the position of the SWAPO President who refused to yield to pressure and repeated before the opening of the New York talks that his organization was firm in its demand for a complete South African withdrawal from Namibia. Other provisions of

the Western plan are also rather questionable. Thus, the proposed withdrawal of the SWAPO troops to "special regions" might only help Pretoria achieve at conference table what tens of thousands of its soldiers have failed to do on the battle-ground, notably, to make the patriots lay down arms.

Such proposal is not accidental. The struggle of liberation in Namibia presents a serious threat

by
OLU IYANDA

unlimited exploitation of the country's natural wealth and fabulous profits and which makes it possible for the West to turn Namibia into a military-strategic springboard for carrying out subversive activities against neighbouring states, above all Angola. No wonder while permitting Vorster to keep his troops in Namibia, Western diplomacy at the same time demands that SWAPO should disarm.

The smiles and assurances of "good will" which the Western parti-

to the racist system which guarantees Western participants in the New York talks generously gave away were meant for the mass media which portray the diplomats of the five countries as persistent fighters for peace, freedom and democracy in Southern Africa. The Namibians, however, know the genuine goals of Western politics, the goals about which Western diplomats prefer to keep silent and the Western press writes but very seldom.

According to a communique issued by the SWAPO leadership, South African troops are using the weapons with which the armies of the NATO countries are equipped, including West German and American heavy machine-guns, British quick-firing guns and French Rockets. The communique pointed out that all these means of destruction have been sent to Pretoria quite recently, i.e., after the UN Security Council's embargo on arms deliveries to South Africa imposed last November.