

THE Abacha coup is justifiable by a patriotic criterion, considering the situation on the ground when he made the coup. At that time, Nigeria was once more on the brink of disintegration. A carefree talk of confederation (i.e. dissolution of Nigeria) rent the air. Separatist voices became strident and adamant, contemptuous of the country itself and very loud. The honour of constituted authority lay in shambles because large sections of the country held that authority in utter contempt. A clamorous section of the press called for open defiance. To cap it all, the old secessionist warlord had the temerity loudly and persistently to resume his secession advocacy.

One must give the devil his due as the saying goes. Sani Abacha was a Nigerian Army officer during the civil war, fought in that war and was lucky to be alive. How would he take another threat of disintegration and civil war? Those who imagine that Nigeria can be broken up without war are living in a fool's paradise, if their wish is paradise to them. Let me make it clear that if I were a military officer sworn to fight for the oneness and territorial integrity of Nigeria, and a situation arose such that politicians spoke and acted with wayward abandon about dissolving the country to the extent that secessionist voices were once more brazenly and persistently raised, I would move to stage a *coup d'etat*. Abacha's *coup d'etat* was certainly more justifiable politically than the Babangida one which did nothing but effect a capitulation to dollar imperialism.

Wherever I have made this point about the status of the Abacha coup, all those who have listened to me have readily granted the point, if the coup was a patriotic move. They have argued, however, that Abacha's coup was not motivated by patriotism.

# Signs of great storms

By Eskor Toyo

Some argue that it was born of selfish motives; others believe that it was part of a design for dominance by a mafia or the selfish and spiteful 'born to rule' elite of a section of the country. Still others think it was born of both personal and chauvinistic rather than a patriotic motive. It may be asked — and it has been asked — if Abacha's coup was prompted by patriotism, why does he want to hang on to office? What explains his hostility to organisations of the people — like trade unions? These questions at the very least cast a heavy cloud over patriotic motivation for the Abacha coup.

My argument is that the situation itself was sufficient to call forth a patriotically motivated *coup d'etat*, even if Abacha as a person was not so motivated. In other words, the coup was politically called for by the behaviour of the politicians, including Babangida as the chief military dictator-politician and Moshood Abiola as his friend and collaborator from the very start till their parting of ways when the ambitions of 'very good' friends clashed at the very end of Babangida's rule. The point we are emphasising is that if we suggest that the Abacha regime should quit immediately in the way we have put forward, it is not because we consider the coup itself uncalled for by anything. It is irresponsible for tribalistic, petty, selfish, unpatriotic, Uncle Tom, and ambitious politicians to keep talking with abandon about dissolving the country as if this country is as empty of patriotism as their own hearts are.

Even if the Abacha coup was called for on patriotic grounds, he has overstayed the justification already. The crisis that brought his regime to power has long been over. The Zik-Gowon Conference and the overwhelming reception given to the tone-setting submissions of the present Speaker at the conference (which was repeatedly carried on television) went a long way to sweep away the storm of disintegration which was gathering on all sides prior to the conference. The attachment to their beloved country by the vast majority of ordinary and conscious Nigerians proved a stone wall to the buffets of the 'Nigeria to hell' crowd. Abacha's own subsequent effort to distance his regime from that of Babangida and to involve all parts of the country at high levels of governance in spite of ethnic and regional chauvinists has helped to restore the commitment to tackling the problems of the country on the basis of one Nigeria.

To my mind, his own role in this return to one Nigeria is a positive and major contribution by Gen. Abacha. He should have left as soon as that role was played. Giving the appearance of wanting to hang on to office endangers the wobbling togetherness that has been restored. The now widespread belief that the coup was selfishly motivated to begin with, and that he wants to hang on to office for selfish reasons or in the service of hegemonic interests in a part of the country is already exacerbating the atmosphere once again. It does not help matters to see inveterate enemies of the regime hiding behind every rustling leaf.

I call on all the country's political leaders and organisations (whether or not they belong to the registered 'parties'), on trade unions and their leaders, and on all real democrats to request that what I have suggested in this article be done, namely, that the government should get formed a provisional civilian government in the manner proposed and immediately hand over to it. The government may ignore the request. If it does, those who make it would have served the cause of democracy and will absolve themselves from responsibility for any disaster that the present course of things will lead into. What is basically faulty is fraught with injustice and pregnant with disaster. Elections conducted by the military are not valid.

On their part, it is important that Nigerian politicians should from now on refrain from giving the impression that Nigerians have no country. The Nigerian Armed Forces, the civil service, the working class movement, the National Association of Nigerian Students, the Academic Staff Union of Universities, the National Council of Women's Societies, Women in Nigeria, the Nigerian Bar Association, the Nigerian Medical Association, the Nigerian Social Science Council and many outstanding Nigerian citizens and important organisations do not think they have no country. The so-called 'political class' people are far from being the most respected elements of Nigerian society. Respect for them is attenuated because since independence they have not conducted themselves in a way distinctly to deserve respect. They keep saying that politics is a dirty game but politics is as dirty as the players are. Even football is clean or dirty depending on the players. There is nothing in the nature of politics itself that makes it necessarily dirty. Will politicians for a change make themselves respectable?

*\*Concluded. Prof. Toyo teaches Economics at the University of Calabar.*