

Socialists on democracy

By Eskor Toyo

I BEG the permission of *The Guardian* to round up my series of flashes on democracy. I embarked on the series of flashes on democracy in order to enlighten Nigerians and educate a much confused world. Democracy must not be cavalierly taken for granted, everyone believing that he knows what it is, and every writer or commentator on politics thinking he is a witch doctor of it. The most bubble-brained idea of democracy is the flimsy flag that the American unidollar globalists have been waving around the world, namely, that it is simply the holding of elections, provided it is the most despicable capitalists, parasites and swindlers, all ready to lick the boots of dollar imperialism, that win those filthy bouts called elections.

The definitive content of democracy is the power and authority of the people and service to their interests by themselves. Democracy is counterposed to the power and authority of a minority of exploiters or oppressors of the people or the power and authority of various masters over them masquerading as servants of society. Like dictatorship, autocracy, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, federalism, unitarism, populism and other social arrangements, democracy may exist in many forms. In fact, looking back at experience since the days of the Greeks, it is truer to say that democracy has been struggling to exist in various hostile social atmospheres than that it has existed. The hostile social atmosphere arises from the parasitism, discrimination and oppressive inequality of all hitherto existing class society. Where

ever the state has existed, society through some 6,000 years has been invariably divided into a rich, big-propertied minority and a sprawling majority of poor, propertyless or nearly propertyless majority. Where money is king, as under capitalism, the monied men dominate the state. Where land is king, the landed gentry dominates the state. This is so, irrespective of the forms of organisation of the state which are capable of endless, and to superficial observers, bewildering variations.

From the beginning of their movement in the third decade of the 19th century in Europe, the socialists the world over have never limited the concept of democracy to what the capitalists or their propagandists mean by it. The socialist conception of democracy is more extended, more profound, more authentic and more appropriate for modern industrial society.

Dr. Toqueville, one of the keenest analysts of American politics, noted in his book, *The American Democracy*, that at the time of his observation, that is, in the 19th century, the American people valued equality even more than liberty. It is the socialists that have continued this accent on equality. They hold that universal adult suffrage alone and a government somehow elected do not necessarily give us a full or genuine democracy. If the country is actually commanded from day to day by millionaires, or if a society is divided into industrial, commercial, finan-

cial and agrarian masters and wage or salaried slaves, the term 'democracy' is wrongly used to describe even the politics of such a regime. Because the socialists retain the idea that a genuine democracy requires real equality of citizenship, their conception is more profound.

The socialist conception of democracy is also more authentic because it centres on the power of the people, and 'the people' are here conceived clearly and rightly as the working people of various categories as against a privileged minority of exploiters. Socialists recognise the reality that basically social power derives from property in the means of production and exchange which are the physical means of life. No honest or knowledgeable social scientist today can contest this fact. Quite clearly, the people may enjoy the right to vote at elections but may lack power. Therefore, a conception of democracy which tackles the question of power at its root is more authentic. The people cannot be said to be in power when the ownership and control of production and finance are not theirs.

We have said that the socialist conception of democracy is more valid for a modern industrial society. In capitalist society, it is not a landed gentry of kings and nobles that dominate, rule over and exploit the working people. Rather, the latter

are dominated, ruled and exploited by masters and overlords that own and control modern industry and all the agriculture, transport, trade and finance connected with it. In the epoch of monopoly capitalism, to say that the countries of Western Europe and North America and Japan are democracies is a misuse of words. They are rather monopoly-capitalist pluto-electocracies. Until modern industry and its financial and commercial concomitants are owned, managed and controlled by the working people who constitute in all countries more than nine-tenths of the population, whatever political system exists cannot be rightly called a democracy, that is, a regime of people's authority and power.

Let us now spell out what we mean by saying that the socialist conception of democracy is more extended. First, let us take the so-called purely political sides. The socialists envisage a state where the working people are very much involved in the running of the state not by voting for others but by standing election and being voted for. They envisage a parliament made up of the working people who enjoy the time to go to parliament and have no obstacles like money, occupational position, or ethnicity operating against them. They also envisage a regime where the working people serve in various committees and commissions running the affairs of state. They envisage frequent consultations with and the direct running of affairs

of the state by so-called grassroots organisations of the working people like trade unions, co-operative societies, professional bodies and communes.

Still on the political side, the socialists envisage that to begin with the ruling party or alliance of parties exercising power are parties of the working people rather than parties financed by and actually serving the interests of parasites but claiming to represent the people. Further still on the political side, the socialists envisage that the armed forces and the civil administration serve the people and cannot be used by any parasitic interest against the people. For instance, the Soviet Red Army was, and the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese armies are people's armies — pure and simple. Their charge is to fight for and defend the working people against all exploiters. They are the last defenders of people's power.

Further on the political side, the socialists extend the concept of democracy to law, law administration and the rule of law. Law under socialism is meant to serve the working people and no law can operate against them in the interest of any exploiter. In the socialist concept of democracy, not only is there the rule of law, but the state also offers free legal services to citizens who need them. The cost of litigation is brought within everyone's reach. The rule of law is greatly paralysed where there are bureaucratic and chauvinistic privileges as well as a high cost of litigation.

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WE have been concerned with the political side. Socialists extend the concept of democracy to the economic side and regard this with the great seriousness it deserves. Social scientific analysis between 1850 and 1890 demonstrated the enormous importance of economic power for everything in society. This analysis did not exist before the electocratic notion of democracy which propagandists for dollar imperialism carry in their heads. It did not exist when the main elements of government in the United States, France, Switzerland and Britain as they are today were being constituted. Socialists think that to talk authentically about democracy, people must be equal owners of the country to begin with. This means that land, factories, mines, energy generating plants, transport services and banks must belong to the people, that is, the working people, to begin with.

If the economic levers of power belong to predators on the people, we cannot speak authentically of democracy. Democracy is people's economic and political power used by the people for the people. Like its feudal, 'Asiatic', and pre-capitalist slave predecessors, the capitalist economy by its very nature as a predatory system violates the fundamental condition of a genuine democracy. By its nature, a capitalist state is essentially a plutocracy. An exclusive focus on universal adult suffrage and an electoral system has become a means of concealing the reality of power, which in capitalism is the power of a tiny predatory minority.

The economic side requires a little more examination. The socialists extend democracy to both the right to work and the distribution of the fruits of work. The right to work does not exist under capitalism. It has become nonsensical to speak of

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democracy in a country where millions are deprived of the means of living in order to save profits for a few millionaire parasites. Where is the citizenship of millions of unemployed people begging for a job for months and years in a system where they must earn a wage as slaves of a few capitalists even to survive? One-man-one-vote means almost nothing in that kind of system. The millionaires pile all the economic votes permanently in their hands, and these are the votes that matter every hour of the day. The real parliament is the meeting of shareholders of the capitalist company, and in this parliament the vote is according to shares.

Concerning the distribution of the results of work, a country where the people work but the goods and profits produced belong to a few predators is the very opposite of democracy. What is done with the income produced by the people in today's capitalism is decided by the boards of directors and the top managers of large capitalist companies. The people are wage slaves!

Let us leave the economy and look at the means of control. Since the early 19th century, three institutions have gained an enormous importance in the decision-making process and political behaviour of people in general in contemporary society. These people are education, the printed word, and mass information media. When the constitution of the USA, for instance, was made, formal education was reserved for a few privileged persons and no one felt the need to educate women. The daily press, the radio and the television did not exist. Today, literacy and education in general are of

enormous importance. The print and electronic media have emerged as powerful instruments of information, misinformation, manipulation and control.

Today, it is ignorant or foolish for anyone to talk glibly of democracy, not asking whether the same educational chances are open to all citizens. It is also ignorant or foolish not to ask who owns the media houses. We know who owns and controls the largest newspapers and magazines in the USA, for instance. It is a few multi-millionaires. He who pays the piper calls the tune. The American people cannot believe what the newspaper and magazine czars and the goliaths of the film-making industry do not want them to believe.

The consummate attention which socialists pay to education exists for three reasons. Education is a cultural value which should be available to all persons as a right. On the functional side, the education of society is of great importance on a day-to-day basis if the economy, the polity and culture are to be built by the people for the people. Finally, the equalisation of educational opportunities is a powerful democratic measure. Under capitalism, full citizenship is limited not only by the privileged position of capitalists in the economy but also by the parasitic bias of the education given as well as the limitation of educational opportunities for those who are not rich. In short, where education is of superlative importance as it is in today's science, literacy and information-based society, to prattle about democracy in the absence of the right and access of all citizens to whatever education is available must be dismissed as careless talk.

Let us turn to the cultural sphere in general. Socialists extend the notion of democracy to the enjoyment of the fruits of culture. In their conception, the highest cultural creations of society and the enjoyment of leisure should not be the privilege of a few predators and their lackeys while the people toil or languish in unemployment. When, for instance, theatres, novels, music, holiday travels, etc., are made so cheap that a man who works normally hard has the income to enjoy them and there is full employment, then they have been democratised. Science is democratised when schools that teach what can be popularised in science are not inaccessible to the majority of young people because of financial handicaps. A most important aspect of democratisation under socialism is the determined effort to do away with racial and ethnic discrimination and to equalise opportunities between men and women. It is of the highest significance that the great Paul Robeson could stand up, as he said, erect and with his head unbowed only in Moscow, the pioneer capital of the socialist revolution.

We need to point out that nothing in socialist society exists on a platter of gold. Socialism is an effort to realise those aspects of humanism and democracy that are possible in modern conditions but not realisable under capitalism basically because it is a predatory master-and-servant system. The deepening or extension of democracy requires revolutionary and humane struggle all the time against any manifestation of selfishness or parasitism. There is no question of a heaven without social struggle. Mankind fought strenuously for and sacrificed a lot to win even bourgeois electocracy, notwithstanding that as democracy it is inauthentic, especially today.

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