

Unpopular Essays

BASSEY EKPO BASSEY



"THERE were people who argued that when it came, military intervention was a remedial game aimed at saving Nigeria from tribalism. I take the view that up till the second half of the Gowon era, military rule was the continuation of tribal politics by other means."

"IN his new year's message, General Obasanjo said among other things: 'We cannot afford to build a nation in which a handfull of people exclusively own and control the means of production and distribution to the perpetual detriment of the majority'."

perpetual detriment of the majority."

The statement in itself reflects a proper understanding of the fundamentals of the problem. And certain actions of the regime indicate a determination to part with the

portation more difficult. And the process of constitution-making can only allow for the drafting and adoption of the manifesto of the commercial comprador.

There is however, an indication that these concessions have been tactical. The ban on champagne and the current attempts to phase out luxury cars are powerful indices to the ultimate class position of the government.

If this observation is correct, if this regime is becoming revolutionary, then it has to take certain steps to avoid the destabilising powers of the West.

Radical policies must be pursued side by side with the appropriate institutions for consolidating progressive gains.

The Nigerian Army shall have to be educated away from its current ivory tower mentality. There has to be a solidarity alliance between it and other progressive organisations like the market women associations, trade unions, students unions and so on.

The army shall then be reinforced by a People's Militia that shall cut across the social classes of society.

Again, the government has to further review its ranks to remove people who do not accept its revolutionary posture.

Another draft constitution should be prepared against ideological teams of reference. A return to "civilian rule" of parliamentary "democracy" should be completely abandoned.

Like military rule, civilian rule cannot be democratic. The reason is in its restrictiveness.

commercial compradors. But there have been a few inconsistencies.

One is its anti-inflation policy. The wage freeze is unpopular, and the price control efforts miss the point. It is wrongly supposed that since government has lifted import duties on certain essential commodities and cut down on the others, that retail traders do not have any reason to sell above the controlled prices.

Unfortunately there is no corresponding check on importers and no effort to transfer the export trade from the comprador class to the public. So that when import duties are lifted on certain commodities, it is only an invitation to this class to make more money from their imports. There is nothing in the system to compel them to transfer the benefits to the ultimate consumers.

This same class interpretation could be

"THE Nigerian army shall have to be educated away from its ivory tower mentality. There has to be a solidarity alliance between it and other progressive organisations like the market women associations, trade unions, students unions and so on."

read into the government's policies on housing, Lagos traffic control, and constitution-making.

On housing, there is the provision for "people" to avail themselves of public funds to build private housing estates. The traffic policy tries to restrict the use of vehicles without making im-

Let our new system be truly representative, representative of the soldiers, workers and peasants.

The murder of General Muhammed could be attributed to the fact that where his policies were radical, he did not create the necessary institutions to back them up.

THE CLASS CONTENT OF MILITARY RULE

THERE was something theatrical about Ukpabi Asika. As an administrator, he was not considered the most efficient of men, but there was no contesting his brilliance as a theoretician. Sunday PUNCH's A. B. Attah had asked him to compare his military regime with the one that went before. That is, Balewa and Co.

By way of answer, the administrator gave a treatise on "the concept of progress". According to him, progress implies hope, hope that "my son will become a better man than myself".

It is this consideration, he said, that motivates a parent to provide the infrastructure for his son to realise himself. So, if the hope is fulfilled and the son becomes a better man than the father, there is no basis for comparison between father and son. The logic is apparent. If father did not provide the infrastructure, son would not have been successful.

That is to say, if the Balewa government had not built the universities and instituted the Sandhurst programme which produced Asika and Gowon, there would have been no question about the military leadership being more successful.

That was Asika some five years ago. Today, there is a greater historical reason for lumping the two regimes together. Both were the natural progressions of Nigeria's ethnic politics. But later, the Gowon/Asika regime abandon-

ed tribe and came to champion the cause of the nascent commercial (NOT industrialist) class.

What do we mean when we say that the Gowon regime eventually came to represent the interest of the commercial class? To answer this question, we have to examine previous tendencies in Nigerian politics as they relate with the

"THE wage freeze is unpopular, and the price control efforts miss the point. It is wrongly supposed that since government has lifted import duties on certain essential commodities. that retail traders do not have any reason to sell above the controlled prices."

prevailing economic fortunes of the country at each historical moment.

This exercise will also lead us to understand the true content of the conflict that confronts the present regime.

The First Republic was a period of great poverty in Nigeria. Groundnut, rubber, tin, cocoa and palm oil were the leading export commodities of the country. Apart from cocoa, they were remarkably low-priced products. And the price of cocoa in the world market was rather treacherous.

Scarcity induced tribalism which was essentially, the politics of poverty. The country's politics which had started out on a na-

tionalist note, eventually came to respond to this economic configuration.

Titans like Azikiwe, Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello became incredibly tribal. From the eve of independence to the end of the First

Republic, they pursued policies that were primarily aimed at consolidating their various tribal elites.

There are people who argue that when it came, military intervention was a remedial game aimed at saving Nigeria from that chaos and confusion which tribal politics had plunged it.

Try as I have, it has been impossible for me to come to the same conclusion. On the contrary, I take the view that military rule, up till the second half of the Gowon era, was the continuation of tribal politics by other means.

Nzeogwu's extensive "head-chopping" list included only two Ibos. His later plea of improper execution does

not tamper with this fact. Ironsi's major appointments made the same political point.

And there was no contesting the northern relevance of the Gowon counter-coup. But oil, which started flowing in the later half of the First Republic had, at this point, completely altered Nigeria's economic fortunes.

The new-found wealth brought with it, the nouveau-riche, a commercial class that swept the government off its feet. Contract award was devised as a means for syphoning the proceeds from oil into the fortification of this class. Indigenisation was another effort at further enriching the class.

In one word, the regime came to represent the class. In the process, Gowon and his lieutenants became very corrupt. Murtala Muhammed's coup owed its legitimacy and approval to this corruption.

Are we therefore implying that the Murtala/Obasanjo regime has pried itself from this confusion? This question resolves itself into another question. What is the class posture of the present regime?

In his new year's message, General Obasanjo said among other things: "We cannot afford to build a nation in which a handfull of people exclusively own and control the means of production and distribution to the