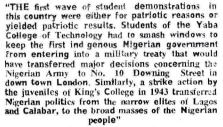
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THE NIGERIAN CHRONICLE

Unpopular Essays

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WHEN Gab Fagbure, a commissioner in the former Western State said that students had no right to consider themselves future leaders, he had no idea how many people would be sold to his views

There were people (mostly students) who were enraged by the commissioner's statement, and there were people who were amused by it. Today, some five years after it had been uttered, Gab Fagbure's vexed observation appears to have solidified into an official attitude towards students in Nigeria.

Because of that, there is a country-wide effort partly to discredit the students who might still have the illusion of being future leaders and partly to compel them to conform with the routines sacrossanct mapped out by the "wisdom of our elders."

The senate at the University of Ibadan leads everybody in this Henceforth respect. there shall be no student demonstrations on campus without the consent of at least, 51 per cent of the entire student population;

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Beyond the veil of ostensible democracy, this measure by the senate in question is an effort to keep protest out of the campus. If for example, students of biology want to demonstrate against their curriculum, they will now have to explain it to the entire student

body who will then go to the polls to decide whether such a plan was kindly conceived or not.

It also means that the demonstrating students, must be able to produce on demand, evidence that 51 per cent of the students in fact approved of their show. Where this inshow. Where this in-volves signing signa-tures, who is going to jeopardise his career by formally declaring himself an agitator?

As has been said, this move towards fas-cism is not local to the headmasters at the uni versity of Ibadan. It is part of an unfair establishment conspiracy. the country over, to check what they imagine is the nuisance value of the younger generation.

Benue State's Governor Shelleng has got the matter correctly guaged. He talks of the lads in dismal and unpatriotic terms. Accord-ing to him, student leaders are being used "as tools by Nigeria's enemy of progress'

We argue that the attitude is unfair be-

cause historically, the Nigerian student has been perceptive where the older generation failed to see beyond their nose.

The first wave of student demonstrations in this country were either for patriotic reasons or yielded patriotic results. Students of the Yaba College of Technology had windows smash to

Nigerian Students:

Irresponsibility

keep the first indige

nous Nigerian govern-ment from entering

into a military treaty that would have trans-

ferred major decisions concerning the Nige-rian Army to No. 10 Downing Street in

Similarly, a strike action by the juveniles of King's College in 1943 transferred Nige-

of Nume-1943 transferred Nige-rian politics from the narrow elites of Lagos and Calabar, to the broad masses of the Nigarian people. Yes, first

broad masses of the Nigerian people. Yes, the N.C.N.C., the first populist political orga-nisation in this coun-try, was the direct result of a protest by King's College students

King's College students against the housing of

British colonial sol-diers on their premises

And recently, the progressive thrust of Nigerian students has

been expressed in their

attitudes towards cor-rupt and progressive regimes. The moment

university students de-cided that Gowon had

become a decided dis-advantage to the coun-

try, the man's regime

Second

during the World War the

down town London.

in

BENUE State's Governor Shelleng has got the matter correctly guaged. He talks of the lads in dismal and unpatriotic terms. According to him, student leaders are being used "as tools by Nigeria's enemy of progress."

We argue that the attitude is unfair because, historically, the Nigerian student has been an agent of progress, not of destruction. He has been perceptive where the oldest generations failed to see beyond their nose.

started the plunge that

saw it out of office in

It was also reported that when Dimka (of

blessed memory) made his radio announce-ment to the effect of

all of us being toge-ther, students of the University of Ibadan took to the streets to

signal what would have counted as the begin-

regime nobody was prepared to tolerate.

This is the success

story of students in Nigeria. The story tells of the need for every

group that rules this country at any point in time, to guage their popularity by student response. In a situation

where students have

July 1975.

demonstrated their determination to have say in the social economic issues of the

The Issue Of Functional country, the outrage of a misgoverned society that is too afraid to protest, will always find expression in the protest. strike actions of students.

> But sometimes, those strike actions strike actions been selfish and even imperonsible. The recent protest lodged by some students of by some students of colleges of technology against a Federal Gov-ernment directed that they cut grasses on their premises is a case in point.

Protests like this have, on several occanave, on several occa-sions, called to ques-tion, the maturity of our student popula-tion and potrayed tion and potrayed them as community that is hard put to defining its values.

But in general terms, the "nuisance" approa-ch of students to natiohal issues can be des-cribed as functional irresponsibility. No

body for instance approved of the apparent irresponsibility involved in the burning down of a police post by students of the uni-versity of Lagos in versity of Lagos in 1973, but there was no disputing the functio-nal aggregate of such methods in persuading Yakubu Gowon that the country no longer wanted him

The test of any education policy regarding the dissent outlets of students, is its ability to balance the need for peace on our campuses with a recognition of the ultimate good for the society of students "indiscipline".

At the moment, such policies are guilty of exaggeration on the side of peace Col Amadu Ali, Federal Commissioner for Education articulated this failure when he announced that any school involved in a violent demonstration shall be closed indefinitely except the head of state intervenes on its behalf.

But the head of state addresses himself to the problem in more fundamental terms. He looks at the student problem as "symptoms of extreme materialism which is definitely alien to traditional so-ciety in this country".

But the society is no longer traditional. The lop-sided country's wealth has meant a dislocation both of the economy and of traditional values. The runaway inflation, the problem of conspicuous consumption have taken their toll of students values, Because of that, they sometimes permit themselves the indulgence of adult indiscipline.

"THIS is the success story of students in Nigeria. The story tells of the need for every group that rules this country at any point in this ne, to guage their popularity by student response. In a situation where students have demonstrated their determination to have a say in the social and economic issues of the country, the outrage of a misgoverned society that is too afraid to protest, will always find expression in the strike actions of students"