

THE MINORITY PROBLEM IN NIGERIA

BY

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Introduction

I am grateful to concerned citizens among the Oron people for affording me this forum to make certain clarifications about the minority problem in Nigeria. Blind emotion will get a country or the world nowhere. I believe in discourses and actions inspired by a humane purpose and informed by science. We are concerned here with ethnic minorities.

Our discourse will be taken in four parts: some preliminary questions, the social systemic context of the minority issue, solutions within bourgeois rule, and solutions possible in the new humanism called 'socialism'.

PART ONE

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

Ethnic Groups and Minorities

There exist two types of what one may call primordial minorities in modern states, namely, ethnic and religious minorities. Primordial groups follow lines of social cleavage handed down by tradition. Men have always had different cultures in which have featured different languages or religious beliefs. The ethnic and religious minorities frequently suffer from exploitation, oppression, repression, persecution, domination and various kinds of discrimination from larger and more privileged groups. Often the attendant injustices and inhumanities are buttressed with violence.

Ethnic minorities are of two types. We shall call them primary and secondary minorities. A primary ethnic group is marked by a distinct language; a secondary group is marked by a dialect of a language spoken by a primary and larger ethnic collectivity. An example will make the matter clear. Compared with the large Yoruba ethnic group, the Tiv ethnic group is a minority. However, within the Yoruba primary macroscopy, the Ekiti, for instance, are distinct from the Egba, the Ijebu, etc. If in the Yoruba macroscopy the Oyo are more numerous than the Ekiti, then the latter constitute a secondary minority in Nigeria.

In Akwa-Ibom State, for instance, the Ibibio are a fairly large ethnic group - by far the largest in this state. However, within the Ibibio group, we have Uruan, Eket, etc. as secondary groups. The Ibibio sub-groups that are smaller than the largest constitute minorities within the Ibibio macroscopy and thus secondary minorities in Nigeria.

Taking Nigeria as a whole there are three very large ethnic groups, namely, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. Compared with them, the rest are minorities, so that the term 'minorities' in Nigeria commonly refers to all the ethnic groups other than the three largest. However, within this large conglomerate of minority groups, there are many gradations in size. Some, like Ijaw, Kanuri, Fulani, Ibibio, Tiv, Urhobo, Benin and Nupe are fairly large. There are quite small ones, like Oro, Bekwara, Angas and Itsekiri that are primary groups.

From the point of view of language, there are clusters of distinct but related languages in Nigeria.

Thus the speakers of Bini, Urhobo, Ishan and Ora speak the Edo cluster of languages. Similarly the speakers of Ibibio, Oro, Annang, Okobo, Ibeno and Efik in the former South-Eastern State speak a cluster of related languages which their Ibo neighbours call 'Mongo' from their common name for water. The speaking of a cluster of related languages, however, does not constitute all within the cluster into one ethnic group, let alone a nation. For instance, in Europe the French, Spaniards, Portuguese and Italians speak distinct languages that are quite closely related within the Romance or Latin cluster. As ethnic groups, the French, Spaniards, Portuguese and Italians are distinct. A distinct language within a cluster is different from a dialect of a distinct language.

In Nigeria, the case of the Fulani people presents a special complication. The Fulani are a distinct ethnic group that have so lived and mingled with the Hausa people into whose territories their ancestors had migrated centuries ago, that ^{it} ~~is~~ makes sense to recognise one hybrid, Hausa-Fulani, even though the two are still differentiated in language and non-Islamic ethnic traditions. Not all those who speak Hausa are of the Hausa ethnic group. Hausa as a language is used as non-English, non Arabic, and non French lingua franca throughout the Western Sudan. The British colonialists, to facilitate communication, got it taught in schools throughout Lugard's Northern Nigeria and got it adopted as an indigeneous lingua franca in the British colonial army of Nigeria.

If we go back to precolonial days, it was not the different ethnic groups that constituted nations in what is now Nigeria. It was rather the different states and kingdoms like those among the Hausas and Yorubas,

x the different dukedoms or chiefdoms like those among the Jukun and Efiks, and the different village-group communes like those among the Tiv, Ibo, Ibibio, and Idoma that each recognised one authority. These were the boundaries of citizenship. The idea of nationality among the Yorubas, Ibos, Ibibios, etc came long after British rule had been established. It was given expression by the formation of ethnic unions like the Ibo State Union, the Ibibio State Union, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, etc. These ethnic unions were formed in the cities of colonial Nigeria where members of the same ethnic group came together for some purposes. Given this history, the Hausas, Kanuris, Fulanis, Nupes, Ijaws, etc. that have no ethnic unions have never been 'nations'. The Yorubas became an ethnic union 'nation' only around 1947 and only for those who formed and supported the Egbe Omo Oduduwa.

NIGERIAN NATION AND NEGLECT OF MINORITIES

x What British colonialists created in Nigeria was not a nation; it was a colony called Nigeria. However, in this colony a patriotic desire arose among the Nigerians themselves for unity, political and economic independence, progress in the form of modernism, and dignity for both the Nigerian and the black man. The Nigeriaⁿ/nation was created by Nigerian patriots and the Nigerian masses with them in the long struggle for nation formation from the 1920s to 1960.

x During this struggle two things happened that are of importance. After 1914, the British colonialists administered Nigeria as a unitary state. Before Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe wrote The Political Blueprint of Nigeria

in 1943, it was generally presumed that Nigeria would be a unitary state. The book by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first to suggest a federation. The presumption of unitarism arose from the actual unitary administration of Nigeria and from the fact that Great Britain, a world dominating state and the administering power in Nigeria, was multi-ethnic and yet unitary in political constitution.

By creating three regions - West, East and North - in 1946, Sir Arthur Richards took a step that pointed in the direction of federalism, although the Richard's Constitution, 1946, was actually a unitary one with regional devolution of some central authority.

The move towards a federal form of government was actually taken by the MacPherson Constitution in 1951 - 52, but the variegated multi-ethnic character of the country was again ignored.

The launching of the MacPherson Constitution led to the emergence of the Action Group and the Northern People's Congress as regional political parties in West and North respectively. The split of the nationalist movement in 1948, the fact that the only nation-wide nationalist organisation, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), was more of a propagandist than an organiser, and the embrace of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe by the Ibo State Union after the death of Herbert Macaulay produced a set of circumstances in which the NCNC also became in effect a political party largely based in the Eastern Region. The Action Group, the NPC and the NCNC embarked on exploiting the MacPherson Constitution in West, North and East respectively. The Action Group, in effect, remained a party with

Yoruba hegemony, the NPC remained a party with Hausa - Fulani hegemony, and the NCNC degenerated into a party with Ibo hegemony.

The primary minorities were side-tracked. They were supposed to exist as underdogs in Regions dominated by the three largest ethnic groups.

From about 1953 started a strong agitation by the primary minority groups for more states to be created in what had become a federation rather than a unitary state. In the Eastern Region, the Calabar - Ogoja - Rivers (COR) State Movement emerged. In the West the Mid-west State Movement emerged. In the North emerged the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and the Borno Youth Movement. Still the minorities were ignored.

The minority agitations, however, led the British colonialists to set up the Minority Commission under Sir Henry Willink in 1957. This Commission lost the opportunity of creating more states to give a real sense of belonging to the minorities.

A second development of importance is that there now emerged in the regions a group of politicians who were ethnic chauvinists of the biggest ethnic groups. In their minds the West was an empire of the Yorubas, the East an empire of the Ibos and the North an empire of the Hausa-Fulanis. They would hear nothing of the creation of more states, which meant the dissolution of their empires. However, ^{when} the Action Group in 1960 became the federal opposition party and made a well-organised effort to go national by penetrating the NPC and NCNC empires in North and East respectively, the NPC - NCNC federal governmental coalition moved to disrupt the Action Group base in the West by creating

the Mid-West State in 1963. The Ibo leaders of the NCNC and the Hausa - Fulani leaders of the NPC set their faces sternly against the creation of any state in East or North.

Such was the situation until young army officers, fed up with the insincerity, selfish ambitions and ethnic war-lordship of the so-called political 'leaders', staged a military coup d'etat in January, 1966.

x The Nigerian people today ought to know that through 1965 the country was seething with minority revolts. In Tiv Division the revolt of 1960 for a state was resumed in 1964. In the Eastern Region, Isaac Boro was preparing a revolt in the Rivers Province of Eastern Nigeria, which was launched as soon as the coup d'etat of January, 1966, took place. In the area that became the former South Eastern State, an armed rebellion was being prepared by the youths, and the ekpe ikpa-ukot movement had started in the Ibibio mainland with the creation of a state as a motive.

x It is noteworthy that the Ironsi military government not only ignored the minority question but also abolished the federal form of government. The latter act was widely interpreted as a move to impose on the country a dictatorship of the Ibo chauvinists. This is at least one of the causes of the counter-coup d'etat that saw Yakubu Gowon in power. Gowon comes from a very small minority group in former Northern Nigeria, the Angas.

It is not surprising that it is under Gowon that a bold and frank move was made for the first time to face the minority question. In July, 1967, Gowon created 12 states in the federation. Almost immediately Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, an Ibo war lord who had seized Eastern

Nigeria in the wake of the Gowon-led coup, declared a secession of Eastern Nigeria and this led to war between Ojukwu's secessionist troops and federal troops under Gowon. It is noteworthy that ^{at least} once when Ojukwu as ruler of Eastern Nigeria spoke of the region, he referred to the minorities there as 'the so-called minorities' as if the minority question really did not exist. Actually, Ojukwu told foreign journalists that the creation of states by Gowon was the trigger of the civil war in which Gowon and he featured as leaders.

We do not refer to this secession and anti-secession conflict as the only civil war, because we hold the view that it was not the first or the only civil war in self-governing Nigeria. The Tiv war for a state was the first civil war. The ^{Boro} Borno-led war for a Rivers State was the second civil war. Because these wars were waged by minority peoples for a state, however, they are treated with levity as if they do not deserve the name of civil war.

Because the politicians of large ethnic groups only play chauvinistic games with the question of autonomy for others, it has been left for successive military regimes to try to face the question of ethnic minorities by creating states and local governments.

The chauvinistic politicians of the big-three ethnic groups bear ^ahigh responsibility for the initiation and perpetuation of military rule.

PART TWO

SOCIAL SYSTEMIC CONTEXT

CAPITALISM AND THE MINORITY QUESTION

Nigeria is not simply a congeries of ethnic groups as ethnic chauvinists see it. After all, the cities and the so-called leaders in government, economy, church and education do not live ethnic lives. The actual evolution of Nigerian society is away from the ethnic world and its traditions. Modernisation everywhere in the world, including Nigeria, implies de-ethnicisation.

We shall take a look at three crucial aspects of Nigerian society which are not rooted in ethnic foundations and yet affect the ethnic minority question. These are capitalism, primitive capitalist accumulation, and imperialism. We start with capitalism.

In Nigeria the capitalist element of social formation dominates the cities and the doings of the elite, and the cities and the elite dominate the rural areas and the country.

As an economy capitalism is a system with a number of key characteristics.

- (a) It is a market system, i.e. a buying and selling system, in which the main players are profit seeking businessmen who own the means of production and trade, including money and physical goods, in the form of business capital.
- (b) These proprietor-operators engage the full-time labour of less fortunate persons as wage earners to produce profits for the business owner.
- (c) These workers must produce a profit for the owners to be continuously engaged.

- (d) A part of the profit produced for the owners the latter accumulate to increase their capital wealth.
- (e) The capitalist enterprises so organised compete among themselves for the highest profit to be gained from the needs of society.
- (f) The accumulation of profits and capital is insatiable, for the bigger a capitalist's capital wealth is, the bigger he still wants to make it, driven either by greed or by the exigences of power competition.

Capitalism is not mere trading, money making or profit making. The employer - employee relationship in which the capital owner or group of such owners is the employer who employs the full time labour of other people as workers to generate a profit for the owner is essential to the definition of capitalism. It is also essential that the profit generated is at least in part accumulated for more wealth and power. It is also of the essence of capitalism that this greed for wealth and the power it gives is continuous and insatiable.

In some capitalist companies these days workers hold very small shares as savings. However, the capitalists, the effective owners of the company, are the owners of large or significant shares. These alone can sit on company boards as directors.

For a country's economy to be capitalist it is not necessary that most of the operators be capitalists. Once an economy rests on buying and selling activities and the main decision makers in it are the proprietors or managers of the relatively few enterprises organised capitalistically, the economy is capitalist.

It should be noted that because under capitalism the goods and profits which the workers produce belong not to them but to their master-users, the capitalist economy is both a master-and-servant and an exploitative one. Exploitation is defined simply as the use of other people for one's own ends. The capitalist economy is thus exploitative by the very character of the employer - employee relationship in it, irrespective of whether the employer is kind or wicked.

Capitalist society has a political and a cultural side. As a polity a capitalist country is organized as a state for law and order. No matter the form of this state the state apparatus and the state's influence are used in the ultimate to protect capitalist property, sustain capitalist contracts and relations and altogether sustain or promote capitalist accumulation.

On the cultural side, capitalism rests on and promotes commercialism, a profit motive in everything, individualism, greed, the use of others as instruments for one's ends, callousness, opportunism, corruption, mendacity, kleptomania, the tendency to cheat in everything, and philistinism (i.e. preference for material things, especially money). It is thus not an accident that in any society developing capitalistically (irrespective of continent, country, religion or precapitalist traditions), these beastly elements of behavior come to predominate.

Since capitalism is the type of system we have described it to be, it is antihuman and discriminatory. The selfishness, exploitation and greed in it lead easily to various injustices in economy, polity and culture. In such a situation all groups are bound to suffer to the extent that they have not capital or money power. Those groups that are minorities in such a situation suffer doubly - both because they

have no capital power and because where numbers are important, as with elections or market size, they are neglected by the greedy fortune hunters. Because capitalism is exploitative and callous, capitalists do not waste sentiments on those who are financially weak. After all, capitalism is not philanthropy; it is the perpetual war of greed.

Primitive Capitalist Accumulation

The initial stage in the development of capitalism is called the stage of primitive capitalist accumulation. This is the stage where all Third World capitalistic countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East have been since the dissolution of direct colonialism between 1950 and 1960. This is the stage at which would-be capitalists get money or other resources from the existing domestic non-capitalist social environment and from the international environment to found and expand capitalist enterprises. A capitalist enterprise is a large or fairly large one. To have the capital for it, one has to have recourse to one or a number of channels of primitive accumulation. These are profits accumulated in long distance trade, land rents, gains from real estate and monetary speculation, government contract, and many kinds of stealing and fraud involving large amounts of wealth. The stealing or fraud is mainly used to divert government revenue or property into private hands. Money got from these sources may be used directly to found capitalist enterprises, but is more commonly fed into banks which then lend to would-be capitalists. This is the way the development of capitalism was financed in all developed and is being financed in all underdeveloped capitalist countries.

Primitive accumulation affects minorities in at least four ways. To the extent that government contracts are used to finance capitalism, the contracts are likely to go to businessmen that belong to larger ethnic groups, since governments in the period of primitive accumulation tend to be very chauvinistic. Secondly, even if the capitalist business concerns are organised as companies, capitalists of the same language group tend to operate together. This is very much the case in Nigeria. Thirdly, businessmen tend to do business on familiar territory, where, for instance, there is no language problem or ethnic inhospitality. Therefore, the larger the ethnic population the larger the initial and familiar market. Fourthly, as all resources in a multi-ethnic country become national resources, a minority group with a valuable and easily exploitable resource but with no financial power in effect transfers that resource to others who can exploit it. In this way, for instance, non-Oron people can do more effective fishing in the waters around Oron, and even Oron fishermen are becoming virtual employees of non-Oron capitalistic creditors. A similar development is occurring in the upper Cross River Basin and elsewhere in the country, where peasants become indirect employees of capitalistic middlemen and creditors.

Imperialism

We shall define imperialism here as the ownership, control and exploitation of raw materials or markets in a capitalistically weak country by large capitalist firms in a country that is stronger capitalistically. Capitalistic strength lies in investment, technological and competitive ability.

Nigeria is a neocolonial country under largely Euro-American domination. Neocolonialism is a stage of capitalist imperialism with the following characteristics.

- (a) The dominated country is formally self-governing.
- (b) Its economy is, however, dominated by foreign large enterprises, such that it is bound to collapse if the foreign large companies even drastically reduce their operations.
- (c) In the international division of labour, it occupies the ^{typical} colonial position of importer of industrial goods and capital from imperialist countries and exporter of mainly raw materials to these countries.
- (d) It is completely incorporated in the world market under imperialist hegemony.
- (e) The local capitalists are in alliance with imperialistic monopoly capitalists for the joint exploitation of the resources and labour of the country.
- (f) The country leans on imperialist military resources in the event of a major armed conflict.
- (g) The expatriate firms invent many forms of economic penetration other than the imposition of direct colonial rule, such as subsidiary companies, joint ventures, soft loans, co-operation agreements with the government of the subject country, certain forms of so-called 'technology transfer', take-over of local enterprises on lease, etc.

A number of things work against minority interests in the imperialistic framework. First, where the subject government is under big-ethnic-group chauvinism, minority interests will be relegated. Secondly, partly because of technical ignorance, the agreements with imperialism do not normally protect the interests of local populations that may suffer from imperialist operations. Thirdly, the expatriate firms are capitalist and what matters to

them is simply present and future profit. Fourthly, the imperialist operators have the financial and technological control and can afford to ignore even the wishes of the subject government *if* they find these wishes very inconvenient financially or otherwise. Lastly, even if benefits accrue from expatriate operations minority people will hardly be the beneficiaries if some financial or numerical power is needed to exploit the benefit.

A capitalist economy develops unevenly in a number of respects. The capitalists develop more than or at the expense of others. Within the capitalist class itself, some develop more than or at the expense of others. Urban centres and their environs develop at the expense of the country. Places favoured by resource or transport advantage develop more than and at the expense of other areas. Where the country is variegated in ethnic composition this uneven development creates problems of neglected or exploited minorities. When imperialism is present these problems may be aggravated by the enclave character of its operations. Enclavism is the limitation or absence of growth stimulating links between the foreign activities and indigeneous ones.

So long as development in Nigeria is capitalistic and under imperialist domination, the arrow points inevitably in a direction of worsening ^{relative} conditions of existence for minorities, especially small ones, within Nigeria. This is not a sentimental matter. It is a matter of the law of motion of societies. Bourgeois governments, imperialists and primitive accumulators will sentimentalise and even launch some cosmetic ameliorative measures. All that will be like sea water on the back of the swimming capitalist-imperialist duck.

PART THREE

SOLUTION POSSIBILITIES WITHIN BOURGEOIS RULE

Certain attempts at solution to the minority question can be made under capitalist rule . We shall look at them.

Federalism and Creation of States

Federalism is itself a solution to the minority question. This is the case because in a federal system certain matters are placed exclusively within the competence of the component states and certain other matters fall within the jurisdictions of both the federal and the state governments.

In this matter the constitutions of Nigeria since independence have been on the whole satisfactory. Those who claim that the Federal Government has been made too powerful by the allocation of subjects are mistaken. The 1979 Constitution, for instance, did not allocate to the Federal Government exclusively anything that for national effectiveness should not be handled exclusively by it. Neither did it place anything on the concurrent list that should not be there. Subsequent drafts screened the lists for subjects to be taken off the Federal Government but found hardly anything, except that the draft under Abacha tinkered with higher education.

Constitutional Provisions

The last draft constitution made provisions for safeguarding minority interests which, on the whole, we find satisfactory.

The number of states existing is the result of bold attempts by the armed forces to face the issue of the very variegated character of the ethnic group question

in the country. The Constitutions merely adopted states created by the last military state creation exercise.

The armed forces also created a large number of local governments. This also is an attempt to face the minority issue.

What is more, the armed forces gave to local governments a direct share in the national revenue, to be paid to them directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation. This is a Nigeriaⁿ/innovation which aims at resolving the minority question.

Further still, revenue allocation, as in the 1979 Constitution, is to be actually debated and ~~allocated~~^{effected} by the National Assembly which has representatives from all Senatorial and House of Representatives constituencies in the country.

The 1995 Constitution provides for 'federal character' to be observed in the making of certain important federal appointments and for 'state character' to be similarly observed in some important appointments at the state level. Local governments are also to observe 'Local government character' in making certain appointments. These 'composite character' provisions seek to ensure to all ethnic groups in the country a sense of belonging.

Further still, the 1995 Constitution makes it a justiciable crime for anyone to be discriminated against on ethnic or religious grounds. It provides for a constitutional court where constitutional cases can be taken and handled without the time wasting in the ordinary courts which normally have enough or more than enough to do.

Concerning revenue allocation we consider it acceptable for revenue allocation to be done by the National Assembly according to any formula adopted by it, following the research and advice of the Revenue Commission. This is what the 1979 and 1995 Constitutions provide. We do not think that any fairer or more democratic scheme could be devised.

Concerning oil revenue, we think that this issue is confused with the minority question. Constitutionally, since colonial times, all minerals found on Nigerian soil (including the soil under ^{her} territorial waters) have belonged to Nigeria or the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The question of oil spillage and gas flaring should be taken up specifically. If oil had been found in some locality in Hausaland, Yorubaland or Iboland, the foreign oil companies involved, the Federal Government and the State Government involve^d would not have behaved differently. We have found scandalous cases of neglect everywhere in Nigeria, including Lagos. If billions of naira are pumped into the hands of some bureaucrats and capitalist opportunists in Port Harcourt, Eket, and Uyo, Warri or Benin City who lose absolutely nothing from oil spillage or gas flaring, that does not take care of the losses, suffering and death borne by the actual fishermen and peasants who bear the ^{brunt.} ~~burden~~. The Bakolori peasant uprising happened in a Hausa - Fulani area and the Agbekoya peasant uprising occurred in a Yoruba area, and both happened in post-colonial Nigeria. They resulted from unbearable neglect and injustice and were met with repression.

Everywhere in Nigeria, peasants are beasts of burden. Others make money out of their misery. The story of all the Marketing Boards illustrates this

eloquently.

Extra-Constitutional Influences

The Constitution alone cannot guarantee a sense of belonging or fair treatment to minorities in Nigeria. Certain influences go beyond the Constitution. As we have seen injustices arise from capitalist development, the processes of primitive accumulation and imperialism that are detrimental to minorities. These influences are, in fact, taken for granted by the Constitution. Let us give consideration here to certain matters.

Military rule is a denial of both federalism and democracy. Therefore, under military rule, no constitutional provision to ensure effective federalism or democratic rule can operate. Those who have suffered rude discrimination since 1966 easily forget the effect of militarism. Out of thirty-eight years of self-rule, nearly thirty have been taken up by military rule. Nigeria has not been a federal democratic state; it has been largely a military dictatorship.

The second non-constitutional influence is the greed, selfishness, opportunism and chauvinism of the so-called leaders who are predominantly from the three very large ethnic groups and other fairly large ethnic groups that these leaders find it necessary to bribe with office to stay in power. Chauvinism is used for power hunting and primitive capitalist accumulation. So long as chauvinism and greed prevail, the minorities must suffer.

A third influence is the meaning of 'majority' in Nigeria even when there are elections. With so much ethnicity, chauvinism, and opportunism in the country, people tend to vote for or project so-called 'leaders' from their own ethnic areas. In such a situation, ^{the} so-called 'democratic majority' vote is actually an ethnic majority vote.

In that case, the minorities are permanently out of government. This is especially so under the presidential form of government.

It would be different if the country were guided by political parties based on clear ideologies, such as nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism or communism, or based on definite positions on issues of conscience like the minority question, foreign policy, education, health, housing policy and the like, that cut right across ethnic or religious boundaries. As it is Nigeria's political parties are merely gangs of camp followers of persons who have enough money to want to be president, governor, etc. Even if there is a so-called programme, it is a vacuous catalogue and no one pays any attention to it. In such a situation ethnic loyalty takes the place that should have been occupied by attachment to party ideals. It is the minorities that suffer from self-centred, frisky and convenient pragmatism.

A fourth influence is the character of the Nigerian police, judiciary and bureaucracy. Because of their corruptibility, those with big money or big political influence are at an advantage. Minorities that have neither lose.

PART FOUR

SOLUTION EFFECTS OF CURRENT HUMANISM

A Preliminary on Anti-Socialism

Humanism is the belief in the dignity and essential equality of all men, which calls for social arrangements and practices that reflect this dignity and essential equality. One can say that there is as much formal humanism in a system as the rights of man as such that that system formally recognises. There is also as much

humanism in reality as the actual enjoyment of the rights of man as such which a system permits.

X The comprehensive^{ve} practical embodiment of humanism today is socialism. Most socialists put before themselves the further ideal of a future communist society that is expected to emerge from the most advanced stage of socialist society when the latter has been achieved.

There is no cause so noble that it cannot have hordes of enemies, no end so humane that men will not be found to want it vanished, nothing so mean that the selfish will not employ it against truth. Socialism is noble, humane, unselfish. There are millions and millions of selfish people in the world and while many of them are capitalists, none of them can be socialists.

X Socialism^m is secular and Christianity and Islam religious. Take Christianity. It resisted capitalism when capitalism started in Europe and is also noble, humane and unselfish. While scores of millions are professed Christians, everyone has not become a Christian, even though Christianity started in the world some two thousand years ago. Christianity has suffered reverses in its long history. Socialism is only nearly two hundred years old in the world. It started as a small movement of a few thousand people in Western Europe in the 1830s. Today it counts tens of millions of adherents who are to be found in virtually all countries of the world. Socialism, too, in its short history, has suffered and, we believe, will continue to suffer various reverses. Yet it is bound to triumph everywhere in the end, just as industrialism and modern science are bound to triumph everywhere in the end. Socialism is bound to triumph not simply because it is noble, humane

and unselfish, but also because of its practical nature as a practical and objective antithesis to practical and objective exploitation of men by men.

The foregoing remarks are necessary because since the fumbling of Michael Gorbachev's leadership in the Soviet Union, the lie that socialism has 'collapsed' has been fanned by the propaganda of the selfish and greedy all over the world. This lie has been swallowed hook, line and sinker by ignorant Nigeria. Socialism is very much alive and well, first of all in the republics of the former Soviet Union. From 1986 to 1996 socialists in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Eastern Europe attempted some reforms in the system of socialist construction ^{originating} ~~organisations~~ from the Stalin period. Because of the mishandling of the reforms by the Gorbachev leadership in the USSR, this effort was accompanied by certain reverses which would never have happened under a less mediocre socialist leadership.

Experience in Europe has shown that whenever, because of errors or otherwise, the socialist ideology is weakened where it was strong, what take its place are interethnic bitterness, interreligious conflict, the disintegration of nations that socialism had united, violent civil strife, war and external intervention by imperialism.

Because of the floppiness of the Gorbachev leadership, socialism has not been given the great credit it richly deserves, namely, the creation of the USSR in the first place as one federal state. Before the socialist revolution in 1917, the vast Czarist empire was a hell of maximum exploitation, maximum oppression, and maximum interethnic bitterness. That this whole rancorous prison of hundreds

of peoples and disparate races, religions and cultures voluntarily united as one socialist^{state}/is a monumental feat that could only have happened under the inspiration of thoroughly dedicated socialist movements like those that carried out the socialist revolutions in various parts of the Czarist empire.

In Western Europe, selfish capitalism has not been able to effect a union of two or more distinct ethnic groups even into a federal state. Multi-ethnic Great Britain and Spain were formed into single states long before the rise of capitalism. The Federal Republic of Germany consists of one ethnic group and yet under capitalism, it has to be federal to effect the Union of Germans. Capitalism can bring people together because of trading interests, but cannot unite them. Its selfishness, grabbing, exploitation, (and) greed and callousness ignite rancour and division. Western Europe is a spectacular example of selfish political and economic division; it is actually the opposite of the kind of union and state formation that economic and political exigencies demand of the peoples of the world today. Western Europe is the wrong pointer for Nigeria because of the economic and political weakness of the black race and the hope that Nigeria offers to all black people. States like South Africa and Nigeria point the way forward.

Minority problems can be solved within the context of multiracial, multiethnic and multi-religious states. This is the road forward.

What Socialists Aim At

To enable us comment on the impact of socialism on the minority question, we must first look summarily at the general aims of the socialists the world over.

These aims can be defined with regard to three spheres of society, namely, economy, polity and culture.

^{For}
~~From~~ the economy, the central aim of socialists is to abolish all forms of exploitation and raise the welfare of all, who have first of all been liberated from exploitation by their fellowmen. This is to be achieved by

- (a) ^S Social or collective working people's ownership of the means of production and distribution, so that all may equally own the means of life,
- (b) distribution of income according to social need and individual or team work only,
- (c) full employment so that all may have access to the means of living from day to day,
- (d) the ^{material} welfare of the people in ever increasing dimensions.
- (e) socialist economic planning where a special attention is paid to eradicating or avoiding the various forms of uneven development.

For the polity, the socialists aim at a democratic political system owned, controlled and operated by the working people, who in all societies constitute the people, as distinct from their exploiters and oppressors. This is to be brought about by

- (a) elected leadership in all spheres,
- (b) ^{the} rule of law,
- (c) people's participation in governance rather than merely in elections,
- (d) absence of the influence of private property or unequal affluence on politics,

- (e) a constitution ensuring human rights that go well beyond the bourgeois conception of human rights, including the right to work and to education, for instance, ~~the right to work and to education~~
- (f) absence of detrimental discrimination based on ethnic, racial, sex, regional or religious differences,
- (g) the right of ethno-cultural groups to one or other kind of autonomy, so that unity is voluntary rather than imposed.

In the realm of culture socialists aim at the humanisation of culture, the advancement of humane culture, and the equal enjoyment by all citizens, according to need and work, of the humane culture that is available in a society for enjoyment. To achieve this they aim specifically at

- (a) free medical care,
- (b) free or virtually free education at all levels,
- (c) free or subsidised recreation,
- (d) subsidised and hygienic housing,
- (e) easy availability of artistic creations,
- (f) scientific education for all citizens,
- (g) an environment that is beautiful and healthy,
- (h) education of all for humanism, including an appreciation of the histories, cultures, creative endeavours and problems of others and emphasis on such things as a scientific outlook and racial dignity for all races.

In short, socialists aim at turning the society from division into masters and servants to unity based on all being masters and no one a servant. They aim at changing the basis of social institutions from selfishness,

greed and predation to sharing, contentment with the essential, and equal partnership.

We must say this at once. Detractors of socialists conjure up what they call 'perfection' and allege that the socialists are aiming at perfection. They then declare with an air of finality that perfection is impossible for man. Such a propaganda trick is silly. The socialists do not themselves speak of any vague thing called 'perfection'. They aim at concrete things that will alter the lot of people in society, and we have listed those things. For instance, full employment as defined by economists may not be achieved in a form or measure that economists would regard as perfect. What is wrong, however, with carrying out transformations that will effect full employment to a degree that satisfies the human conscience, even if the economist regards the achievement as imperfect? More generally, must we abandon ideals because they cannot be perfectly achieved? Must we, for instance, abandon Christian ideals for barbaric religions because no one or group has been able after two thousand years to practise or realise the Christian ideals perfectly?

Socialism and the Minority Issue

The things that the socialists aim at create a social environment and lead to rules and practices that can go a much longer way to resolve the minority problem than is achievable under capitalism. The United States of America, for instance, is a country of perpetual minority dissatisfaction, outcry and lobby, because in a community where money is king and exploitation is the basis of so-called achievements, minorities are neglected unless they do something to impose themselves

on the attention of the financially powerful.

Given the world as we have inherited it, even under socialism there is not and there cannot be any perfection in the solutions to the minority question based on efforts to achieve the socialist aims we have set out. These efforts have been very genuine and dedicated in the ^{countries} ~~countries~~ that have so far embarked on building socialism. The handicaps under which the socialists have worked must be honestly appreciated.

First, there were inherited inequalities which could not be overcome at once or after many years, in spite of consummate efforts.

Secondly, the regions where socialist^s revolutions succeeded were not like Britain or France. Barring East Germany and ^{Cz} Zechoslovakia, they were relatively underdeveloped countries with a lot of premodern traditions still potent and a lot of exploitation, autocracy and ruthless cruelty practised by the ruling class, which kept alive bitter memories and attitudes of hostility and suspicion.

Thirdly, it must be realised that although the leadership and the country was going socialist, everyone was not a socialist. Taking the population as a whole, the ideologically well groomed and active socialists were a small minority. That the working people generally agreed with socialist aims does not mean that antisocialist and selfish people were not many.

Fourthly, owing to certain historical circumstances, the state that was supposed to be socialist was more bureaucratic and corrupt than the socialists themselves wished. This was, in part due to remnants of past social attitudes and practices, in part due to the pressure of

counter-revolution which called for a firm enforcement of revolutionary authority, in part due to lack of experience, in part due to the fact that the socialists had to make use of non-socialists in solving problems, and in part due to opportunism, since some people got themselves promoted into positions of trust but were socialists only on paper.

Fifthly, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as federations collapsed because, compared with all other federations, including Nigeria, they were lopsided. Each of them contained a nationality that was so much larger than others as to dominate the federation, no matter what members of the other nationalities did. They were more lopsided than the ~~three~~ three-state or four-state federation of Nigeria (1960 - 1967) with the Northern Region as one state. What their experience demonstrates is that even under socialism lopsided federations cannot be expected to exist in perpetuity. After all, it is historical contradictions difficult to resolve that lead to a federal form of union in the first place.

Lastly, the state is an instrument of social coercion in the last resort. Where a federation is lopsided, the influence of personnel from the dominant state will be predominant in the central apparatus. Citizens of the minor states are bound to live in perpetual fear, no matter how altruistic are the aims of the ruling party or the practices of party personnel in office.

In the USSR, in addition to Union Republics and local governments, the solution

to the ethnic minority problem included the creation of autonomous regions or republics within the Union Republics. These autonomous areas enjoyed a limited autonomy in certain matters. This solution could have been appropriate for Nigeria if the 12-state structure of the Gowon period had remained. ^{Makers} Matters of constitutions in Nigeria, however, seem to be completely unaware of this solution. Still it can be used in Nigeria without dissolving the existing states.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic minority problems came to exist in the world when the formation of states brought various peoples together under one political authority. The minority problem is resolved differently in slavery, feudalism, capitalism, capitalist colonialism and socialism.

For the foreseeable future the minority problem in Nigeria will continue to exist. There is no state in the world where one form or other of the minority question does not exist. Wherever it exists, however, it is finally resolvable only through a genuine democracy, a genuine humanism, and education informed by a scientific attitude.

Actually there are in Nigeria minorities that may be called settler minorities. These are small groups from one ethnic group whose ancestors long ago went for one reason or other to settle on territory belonging to another ethnic group and have mingled with the latter. On a large scale we have the case of Fulanis who settled among the Hausas. On a ~~small~~ scale, we have several examples, for instance, the case of Efiks among the Oron people in what is now Jamestown. If Nigeria were to break up what would happen is not the peaceful independence of the so-called 'nations' of the ethnic unions that owe their very existence to Nigeria.

what would happen would be interethnic wars throughout the country. Questions of who joins whom, who takes order from whom, and who owns where and what would sharply arise. All history shows that they would be settled by war. [The minority problem in Nigeria is very capable of peaceful resolution, since the Nigerian federation is far from being lopsided. It is bound to be aggravated so long as the country remains capitalistic, the process of primitive capitalist accumulation prevails, and imperialism retains its hold on the country. It is also bound to be aggravated so long as political parties are not ideological formations but mere convenient cake-sharing conglomerates.

The constitutions of Nigeria afford the minorities the formal opportunities of fighting for the abolition of scandalous injustices, provided the affected are articulate and have the money as a last resort to go to court. However, so long as those in power are greedy chauvinists, the minorities will receive little or no attention.

Because its inspiration is the abolition of exploitation and various forms of social inequality, the socialist drive after a socialist revolution is the best guarantee that everyone will be treated simply as a person. After overcoming historically-inherited inequalities, this accent on the equality of all as human beings is the best guarantee that any minority question will receive a well deserved attention. The people handling the question, however, have to be genuine socialists and not opportunists masquerading as socialists.

* This lecture was delivered on 25th June, 1999, at Oron, at the Oron Civic Centre on the invitation of the Oron National Forum.