

SOME have interpreted President Babangida's recent remark that ideological and religious extremists should and will be excluded from that transitional political process in the search for stability to apply to 'Marxists.' We find this reading of the President's mind presumptuous, even though such interpreters apparently have to their credit the setting aside of the recommendation of socialism by the Political Bureau, and the visible hostility to the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), to the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and to the so-called 'Marxist' camp of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). However, the setting aside of the Political Bureau's recommendation regarding socialism can be explained otherwise and the hostility to the various popular organisations can be seen as arising loans.

After all, the President has at least one Marxist advising him who has not renounced Marxism. Moreover, he has not decreed that Marxists should play no part in any of the processes of transition to civil rule. He deserves not to have words put in his mouth. But let us examine

Who is an ideological extremist?

ideological extremism. We shall leave religious extremism severely alone in this exercise.

Adherents of pacifist ideology will hold that coming to power by a coup d'état is political-ideological extremism. Are they right? Are the pacifists themselves extremists, since they hold in principle that under no circumstance whatsoever should any government, no matter how diabolical, be changed by armed action?

NACAP (National Committee for Action Against Apartheid) recently concluded an international conference in Lagos. All of us who participated at that conference in some capacity, including Nigerian's President, Foreign Affairs Minister and Minister of Defence, agreed that armed struggle was necessary to battle against apartheid and should be vigorously pursued. In the eyes of such people as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, George Bush and P. Botha, we all turned out to be a crowd of ideological extremists. Well, should those of us Nigerians who participated at

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that conference have no part — even as patriots — in Nigeria's transition to civil rule?

Take the Structural Adjustment Programme. It is certainly inspired by the ideas of free-market 'extremists' who in economics and economic policy belong to the neo-classical school of liberal ideology. Should not advocates of SAP participate in the transition to civil rule?

While we are on SAP, take the ban on wheat imports. The US Government has recently come out to say that even though they approve of SAP and self-reliance as concepts, the approach to both by Nigerian authorities is extremist since it includes such 'extremist' mercantilist acts as the banning of US wheat regardless of US economic difficulties and the payments conditions for sustaining and expanding the volume of Nigerian-US trade. Should not Nigerian SAP policy makers participate in the transition programme?

According to the 1987 yearly Conference of the Nigerian Economic Society (NES), SAP is welcome in principle, but it is operated in such a way that it hits the common man mercilessly and violates national interests.

Let us pass on to MAMSER. Many rich people, top officials and chiefs are not happy with the interpretation given to 'economic recovery, self-reliance and social justice' by MAMSER. For instance, MAMSER agents go about telling peasants to form marketing co-operatives to avoid exploitation by middlemen. This is antagonistic to the middleman's concept of live and let live. It is 'extremist.' Are MAMSER agents to be banned from participation in the political process?

By the way, the middleman's notion of *live and let live* including the following example narrated to the present writer by Kaduna State MAMSER. A middleman bought a crop on the farm from a peasant farmer for ₦100. Right before the farmer, he resold it for ₦900 to another middle man. Of course, the

second middle man will go to the city and resell for whatever you are free to imagine.

Furthermore, was the government guilty of fascistic extremism in simply dissolving the NLC and authorising a State Administrator to take over its affairs, an action widely condemned by the Nigerian press? What right has the Government itself thereafter, to participate in the political process?

In his speech, the President explained 'extremists' to mean that those so described are not democratic and are not disposed to listen to the views of others. Granted. The Political Bureau went to the grass roots all over the country in an elaborate effort of democratic consultation and listening to the views of all.

We believe that the President's emphasis on social justice is much more meaningful and helpful than the vague notion of 'ideological extremism' which in present circumstances can only serve the interests of the tiny minority of anti-people bigots in high places.

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