

5/1/2006

To BJ at 60

Appendix
5/1/2006 (Lagos)

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In lieu of tribute to Comrade Biodun Jeyifos at 60

1. (i) Protocols
 - * Greetings (from me, Bene and Comrades, friends and compatriots from Calabar)
 - * Thanks for this invitation.
- (iii) Explanation: It is not that I had refused to come to Lagos, or to move out of Calabar, for more than 11 years, until now. It is that I have been unable to do so, until now.
- (iii) Why am I here? I am here not to pay a tribute to BJ at 60: for I still don't know how to do this. I am here not to review his life and work, up till now. I also do not know how to do it; and I feel no compulsion, since the man is still alive, and working.
I am here to do two things:
 - (a) To thank and commend the organizers of this event, and to partake in the dinner, and listen, and learn.
 - (b) To help to fill some of the gaps which I know exist in the public knowledge of BJ as a revolutionary socialist, and a Marxist thinker. And the public, in this sense, includes BJ's friends and colleagues in the literary community, the organizers of this events. For there must be several incidents, relationships, mood changes, failure to meet obligations, assumption of strange obligations, sudden and

unannounced absences and disappearances, statements, actions which BJ had not been able to explain satisfactorily to his friends and colleagues. I am here to help to fill the gaps thus created in your knowledge of him.

(c) A quick justification: If this had not been arranged as a public event, in other words, if it had been arranged as a private, family event, I would, perhaps, not have seen any need to say anything. But then, this is a public affair, a statement to the world. And BJ is 60, and the environment is uncertain and treacherous.

2. Periodisation: Through my own prism, I can see BJ's 30 year (1975-2005) involvement in Left Politics, so far, separate into three broad periods of approximately equal lengths:
 - A. 1975 - 1985
 - B. 1985 - 1995
 - C. 1995 - 2005

3. I shall focus on the first period which itself separates into FOUR sub-periods:
 - (i) 1975 - 1977
 - (ii) 1977 - 1981
 - (iii) 1981 - 1982
 - (iv) 1982 - 1985

4. During this 10 year period (1975 - 1985), BJ was a professional socialist revolutionary, in the sense that in all department of his life and in all his activities – academic, social, occupation, family, even popular –

democratic politics – BJ was to put the matter very, very mildly - deeply influenced, and guided, by the vanguard revolutionary formations to which he belonged, and the vanguard revolutionary programmes to which he subscribed. Throughout this ten-year period, the central question and thus strategy, remained essentially the same, but the organizational forms and sets of tactical options changed from sub-period to sub-period.

5. One of the formulations of this central question can be found in BJ's Foreword to my book *Human Progress and its Enemies*, published in May 1982. It went like this:

“This thesis is that human progress, in the final analysis, is measurable, not in abstract statistical terms, not in the quantity of goods and commodities consumed within a lopsided socio-economic system, not even in the proclamations and slogans of socialist-oriented and popular regimes, but in the degree to which the exploited, marginalised groups and classes in society liberate themselves from poverty and degradation and in so doing simultaneously liberate their vast productive and creative capacities from the exploitation and manipulation of their oppressors so that a general advance of society toward a disalienated, fully humanized society is thereby enhanced.”

(1981)

6 First Sub-period (1975 – 1977)

Main Events

(a) Background to September 1975

- First meeting with BJ, Ibadan September 1968 (?)
Campaign for NUNS' position.
- Had been released from Detention
- A “Civil War” had erupted in our group shortly after our release.

- (b) Second Meeting: It was during this war that I met BJ for the second time. He joined our faction of the movement, and strengthened it – such that in our National Congress held on Christmas Day in 1975, we were able to declare ourselves the winners of the war. (Sept. 1975)
- (c) Constitution of Headquarters
Disengagement from the University and Physical Movement to HQ: Became professional revolutionaries. BJ's campus residence was my own transit camp in the movement to HQ.
(June 1976 – Sept 1976)
- (d) First major crisis in HQ (October 1976)
Resolution of crisis (role of BJ)
The forging of an unbreakable bond between BJ and me
(November 1, 1976)
- (e) Dissolution of HQ (April 30, 1977)
Movement to Calabar (May 1, 1977), and the immediate constitution of a new HQ.

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Second Sub-period (1977 – 1981)
(Main Events)

- Constitution of a New HQ
- Re-engagement in the University
- Ali MUST go : Dismissal from University
- Election of BJ as ASSU President (April 1980)
- Appointment of a Sec-Gen for ASUU (November 1980)
- Setting of NANS
- Murder of Ingrid, after her brief tenure as Secretary, ASUU – UBC
- The establishment of a strong radical students' movement in Calabar and a strong group (socialist group). Emergence of KK and others.

8 Third Sub-period (1981 – 1982)

(Main Events)

- Back to University
- Strengthening of HQ: Setting up of RD
- Crisis in ASUU (beginning) and parallel crisis in HQ/RD

(Decision taken were even more radical than those of June 1976)
(Role of BJ)

9 Fourth Sub-period (1982 – 1985)

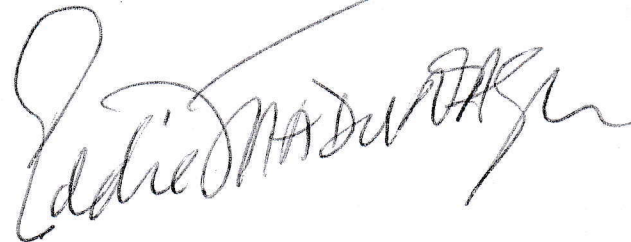
(Main Events)

- End of BJ's two-year tenure as ASUU President
- Chris Mammah became National President, NANS
- Activities beyond our shores
- Constitution of a new HQ
- Resignation from University * Setting up of NDR
- Movement to The Guardian/Ibadan/US

Thus * Dispersal (not dissolution) of members HQ.

- Emergence of Bene as Secretary, ASUU – UCB
- Affiliation of ASUU with NLC

(Note the effects of Dec 1983
coup on our movement)



- 10 Selected Readings from BJ
- (a) Politics and the future of African Culture (1977)
 - (b) The Headless Revolutionary Process: Tactics and Method in a Theoretic and Programmatic Void (The Nigerian Left in the Post-Civil War Period, 1970 – 79) (1980)
 - (c) Forward to Human Progress and Its Enemies (1981)
 - (d) The Limits of Reformism in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Registered Parties. (1983)
 - (e) Literature and the Cultural Sub-soil: The Conservative, Reformist and Revolutionary Approaches (1983)
 - (f) The Political Bureau (Specially Commissioned Papers) The State and Religion (1986)
 - (g) On Awoism, the Artist and the Political Estate in Nigeria (1988)
 - (h) Perspectives on Left Unity and Party Formation: Minimum Programme and Organizational Structure (1989).