

Radical faith and permanent struggle (1)

I DO not approve of radical commentators advising the government on what to do. Nor I do endorse the issuing of threats. On each occasion when it is considered necessary to talk to the government, a radical commentator should simply analyse the situation, indicating the possible outcomes of government actions and policies. The radical commentator should also not tell the people what to do. He or she should simply analyse the situation, indicating why it is so and, at times, why it has to be so, given the balance of forces. More explicitly, the radical commentator should reveal government's interests in doing what it is doing, the power it has to do it, the limits of this power and the character of those limits.

History and experience have taught me that a radical commentary is useless if it cannot become a *material force* and that it cannot become a material force unless the people can *independently* deduce from it, a line of action, and act on the basis of that deduction. Put differently, a radical commentary should simply be a mirror — a plain mirror, not a curved one — for the government and the people to see themselves and the real state of affairs.

I adopt this line of action because I accept the view that a government, any government anywhere in the world, is simply "the executive committee of the ruling class." whose primary mission is to protect and advance the interests of this class. Periods of *caesarism*, or *bonapartism*, when a government

appears to be independent of conflicting class interests are brief in history. In any case, we have never had such periods in Nigeria.

It is dangerous to proceed from the premise that the government is ignorant or foolish. For a government, more than any other institution in society, has access to information and advice. And, more than any other government since independence, the present regime has been pursuing conscious aims. A government can, of course, be misled on isolated issues. But he is under the worst form of illusion who believes that a government which has been sailing a clear course is being misled.

But some respected and well-meaning Nigerians have held a contrary view. When I expressed my position, summarised above, in one of the sessions of the Political Bureau in 1986, a particular member, an experienced political scientist — the real moving spirit of that body — countered, emotionally, that this government was open to progressive influences. He argued that it would be unpatriotic and irresponsible for us to allow reactionaries and conservatives to influence the government away from the path of serving the people. When I pressed the matter, this member became visibly distressed; and we had to adjourn to allow tempers to cool. Outside the Bureau, another respected member of our society, a world-acclaimed intellectual, drew a distinction between this government and the one that preceded it: This government *listens*, but the previous one did not.

I don't know the current opinions

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of these and other respected Nigerians on this question. But I think it is necessary to continue to hold up the mirror for the government and the governed to see themselves. What I see is depressing.

Our country, Nigeria, is in a very bad state. The social question is as acute as ever; the class question has deteriorated beyond what it was at independence 31 years ago. In spite of the transition — or indeed because of it — the question of democracy, posed during the political debate five years ago, has disappeared from the national agenda, to be replaced by a sickening caricature, a perfect parody. *Culturally and socially*, our country has suffered a degeneration whose degree is shocking to those of us born before independence.

The Nigerian society is in a state of anomie, to borrow from Wole Soyinka. A researcher into the social phenomenon called *philistinism* does not need to go beyond Nigeria. Part of this philistinism includes the fact that the ruling class, its state functionaries and ideologues do not see it. All they see is "incitement" or "confrontation," even in acts that are meant to relieve them from primary responsibility for this state of affairs.

Our people are hungry, very hungry. But that is not their only problem. They are also unfree. Slaves used to be fed, and guaranteed security, but denied freedom. Most of our people today have neither food, nor security, nor freedom. This ever deteriorating state of affairs has always required a radical solution, where "radical" means "from the roots"

"original" and "thorough-going". Only members of the ruling class and other people wedded to the present state of affairs and the various evils it generates are afraid of the word "radical". And they give the task of voicing their fears to official slanderers.

The radical movement and its detachments did rise to the occasion — to save the nation. But the transition programme and the events in Eastern Europe have combined to atomise them, and have almost disarmed them politically and ideologically.

The transition programme and the campaign against "extremists" first split the movement down the middle, with a faction opting to take part in the transition politics and the other opting out. No dialectical middle course was sought. With time, each faction split into sub-factions on the question of tactics. The events in Eastern Europe later came to inflict ideological paralysis on the movement. Instead of struggling to understand and explain, instead of battling to overcome their various disabilities, many leftists once again retreated to abstract and sectarian politics from which we thought we had emerged. Others simply threw in the towel, proclaiming socialism dead and radicalism doomed.

It was in this state of affairs that Emevw Biakolo came out with his article, *Radical Faith* (*The Guardian*, January 5, 1991), re-opening a discussion which many radicals hoped would help rescue the radical movement from the corner into which it had allowed itself to be boxed. But alas, the discussion was again derailed. The

present series of articles will attempt to channel the discussion back to its original terrain.

The Tanzanian President, in a recent address to his country's academic community, said something to the following effect: If you see an injustice being done, try to stop it; if you cannot stop it, then call on other people to help stop it; if you cannot do this, then speak against it; and if you cannot speak against it, then do something — however symbolic — to show that you are opposed to it. In other words, there are four levels of response to injustice, four options which the President arranged in a descending order.

Shortly after reading this statement, I read an article written by one of my colleagues — a Nigerian academic of progressive orientation — opposing the *open ballot*. He prefaced the article with the statement that he was writing for historical record, not with the hope of persuading the government. In other words, my friend was adopting a very passive variant of Mwinyi's third option. And when *The Guardian* was closed, my friend must have moved over to the fourth option — may be by refusing his lunch since there was nothing else he could have done to show that he was opposed to government's actions.

In Tanzania, President Mwinyi's statement was regarded as conservative; in Nigeria my friend's statement is radical. When you remember that Tanzania is, in fact, a de-radicalised society, you will begin to appreciate the state of political response in Nigeria.

• To be continued next week. This is the first of a five-part article.

Radical faith and permanent struggle (2)

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THE war against radicals, started by the British colonial administration in Nigeria, became a creed under the present military regime. Sometime in 1984 President Babangida, then Chief of Army Staff, warned that the military regime of which he was a key member would not tolerate "undue radicalism." The statement was duly criticised in the print media, including *The Guardian*, where the original report was carried. Having thus settled accounts with a provocative statement, both sides allowed the matter to rest, and it was business as usual.

Four years later, General Babangida, now President, raised the question again. The occasion was the official submission of the report of the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) in Abuja on March 1, 1988. The President, while receiving the report, warned that the Constituent Assembly, soon to be inaugurated would contain no "extremists." He said that those seeking membership of the assembly would be screened to "discourage extremists in our body politic." The composition of the Constituent Assembly and its subsequent report proved beyond doubt that the regime was not joking.

The President was again criticised, but this time the criticism was more intensive and extensive. It however, acquired no organisational form, instinctive or deliberate. While this was going on, Patrick Wilmot, a Jamaican-born radical Sociology teacher at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) was abducted and deported from the

country. Wilmot had taught for 18 years at ABU and is married to a Nigerian. Shortly after this, David Jang, then governor of Gongola State, warned in an Easter message that the military government would not "allow extremists to take advantage of its human rights posture to detract it from its set goals."

Up till this time, the regime had not defined what it meant by "extremism." The definition came in October 1988 in a speech the President delivered at the 10th graduation of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru. He defined extremists as those who are "uncompromising, fanatical or immoderate in their views; who go beyond the limits of reason, or propriety to advance their cause; or who exceed the ordinary, usual or expected limits of decency in doing that. The extremists do not bother to deliberate where their own rights and those of others begin. These are not believers in the politics of equality; they are not democratic."

As a theoretical exercise, the President's definition is correct. Nothing is achieved in politics and ideological disputation by confronting an abstract definition with another abstract definition. Nothing is achieved by turning round the word "extremism" or throwing it back at the source. A resort to this may even be counter-productive for it may land us in a trap set by the opponent. Abstract definitions are useless except as a starting point for concrete analysis. Definitions have to be put in historical context and

applied to concrete reality. By situating the abstract definition of extremism in historical context and applying it to concrete reality, the meanings of "uncompromising," "expected limits," "decency," etc, appear in bold relief. If this regime dodges the concrete reality, we have to drag it there. In any case the President moved a step to the concrete in his Kuru speech. He said: "Let me reiterate that we have not sought to choose those who will succeed us. We have only decided on those who will not. We are also resolved that we will not be succeeded by extremists... The two types of extremists we seek to exclude from the transition programme are the ideological and the religious ones. We do not believe that anything but the good of this country will come out of the decision to exclude them."

By the end of 1988 the whole country had known whom the regime meant by extremists. They are the *leftists*, especially those with Marxist pretensions. This was even made explicit in the Kuru speech; it was later repeated in the President's speech at the 1989 *Guardian* lecture.

To be fair to Nigerian *leftists*, an ideological battle was initiated against the regime and its "anti-extremist" theoreticians. Organised resistance was even attempted: we remember the attempt to form the People's Liberation Party (PLP) the Labour Party (LP) and

later the Popular Democratic Front (PDF). We remember Gani Fawehinmi's courageous attempts to host an *Alternative to SAP* seminar. We remember the abortive National Conference spearheaded by Alao Aka-Bashorun and others. Some groups such as the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) and Constitutional Rights Projects (CRP) have survived. But in the main the response to the "anti-extremist" campaign has been abstract, localised and episodic. And the nation is the worse for it as recent events have shown.

From being a confrontation between the regime and Nigerian *leftists*, the "anti-extremist" debate has now become a subject of debate within the left. On this ideological battle, the *right* has won an undeserved double victory. I hold that it is in the interest of the nation to creatively throw back the challenge at the original formulators of extremism. But since the debate has unfortunately settled within the ranks of the left, it has to be exhausted there.

The latest round of debate on 'extremism' or 'radicalism' was opened by Emevwo Biakolo, a radical teacher of English at the University of Ibadan and an associate member of *Guardian's* Editorial Board. His article which appeared in *The Guardian's* issue of January 5, 1991, was titled *Radical Faith*. This was followed by the following articles, all

of which appeared this year on the opinion-page of this newspaper: Sesan Ajayi: *In praise of extremism* (January 27.); Sina Kawonise: *Appraising extremism* (April 5); Emevwo Biakolo: *Extremism and the politics of ogre* (April 20); Wale Olaitan: *Extremism: Beyond self-righteousness* (April 27); Kunle Amuwo: *Extremism: A further exploration* (May 20); and Titi Adepit: *Columnists at work* (May 23). All these contributors are young academics, most of whom — if not all — are on the left.

Three general observations are necessary before we proceed. The first is that the language employed in what ought to have been an enlightening disputation has been intolerably abstract and unnecessarily difficult — if not obfuscating. As a result, the debate has not been illuminating, or as illuminating as it could have been — judging from the importance of the subject under consideration and the unflattering political conjuncture which produced the debate. It would be wrong to call the debate *academic*. For an alienating discourse cannot be said to be academic. Our radical academics have not tried to combine sophistication with accessibility. Each time I go through the debate I have this feeling that the language is a measure of the authors' distance from political practice. All of them are not equally culpable, but it is unnecessary to go into such details. I am only describing the main trend.

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Radical faith and permanent struggle (3)

THE second observation on the current round of the extremism debate is that in pursuing this debate in an abstract and tedious fashion, the debaters forgot, or ignored an elementary rule in *ideological* disputation, namely, that there should be a constant review of the terms and categories employed. For in politics no term or category is ideologically neutral. The term "extremism" has acquired an ideological content in Nigeria; it has been captured by the ruling class and conservatives and converted into a reactionary weapon. If an opponent has captured or appropriated a category, it might be necessary to shift grounds and define/adopt a new one, a better one, and confront him with the new language. This, of course, cannot be done in all cases. For some shifts can amount to total surrender or even suicide. As an example, there can be no shifts from the terms socialism, communism, marxism and historical materialism. But the term "extremist" ought to have been abandoned long ago, and a new one, such as *maximum or maximalist*, adopted.

The third observation is what I perceive as a very narrow, and therefore dangerous, conception of *struggle* exhibited by our debaters. When we read about the Nigerian radicals' struggle before independence we know what they were struggling for: simultaneous defeat of colonialism and by-passing of neo-colonialism, in other words, theirs was a struggle to

pass from colonialism to popular democracy. When Angolans said "A luta continua" (the struggle continues), we knew what they meant: The military defeat of Portuguese colonialism, and the setting up of a popular democratic state. Later the slogan acquired an additional content, namely the defeat of apartheid-backed reaction at home.

But when the term struggle is used in contemporary Nigeria, what do we really mean? Do we mean ideological struggle on the pages of newspapers and in lecture halls against the bourgeoisie? Or moral struggle against the corrupting influence and pressures of the bourgeois society? Or legal defence of the oppressed? Or popular education? Or political agitation? Or the construction of national platform? Or the establishment of the basis for sustained political-ideological work? Or the struggle for state power? Or all of the above? Indeed, struggle for what? I shall come to this question later, I merely wish to draw attention to the fact that the concept of struggle is a complex one, for the reality it tries to capture is complex, multi-dimensional and inseparably integrated. Suppose one had narrowly conceived *struggle* as writing articles in *The Guardian*, or in newspapers generally? See how in a twinkle

of an eye the struggle could have been terminated by a fascist state. Let our young academics climb down from the heights of philosophy onto the ground

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of politics, and they will see more clearly.

Emevwo Biakolo, in his passionate advocacy of *radical faith* has this to say: "Next to the belief in God — the next most profound and fervent object of faith is the nation. The sort of faith which is required in the nation is not a tepid or terrified faith. It is a fervent, abiding faith, a radical faith... This form of belief rejects half-measures as solutions to the nation's problems... A radical faith is faith in ourselves, a confidence that in spite of our short-comings and the mountain of problems arrayed against us, we can realise our ideals, if our would-be saviours would only let us be" *The Guardian*, January 5, 1991). That is the philosophical aspect of his advocacy.

Now, the political: from Biakolo "A radical faith is a total adherence to the supremacy of the rule of law and constitution created and ratified only by the people of the nation or their elected NOT, accept constitutions and parties foisted on an entire population by a small ruling class."

I draw attention to some critical indicators in Biakolo's article. He advocates a belief in the nation, which he defines as "the *totality* of the people in a country," but he goes on to implicitly recognise that this entity is not homogeneous. Note that he contrasts

"we" to "our would-be saviours," and asserts that radical faith will not accept the dictatorship of a "small ruling class." Some critics may say that Biakolo is not a socialist; he himself may even deny the appellation. But these indicators show that he is not only a revolutionary democrat, but an ally of socialism — for all practical purposes.

I have for long held the view — and I must hasten to add that I am not the first to express it — that an honest christian or muslim will, with time, become a socialist in the sense that he or she will discover that socialism tries to establish on earth here the (material) conditions for the realisation of those spiritual ideals which he or she holds dear.

I do not know Biakolo's attitude to *liberation theology*, and I have not tried to ask him. But I see in him a radical convergence of christianity with revolutionary democracy. This convergence he called radical faith. Radical faith, as defined by Biakolo, implicitly includes the idea of permanent struggle. But this inclusion should be made explicit, and that is what I am trying to do. By adding *permanent struggle* to this faith, I have merely *secularised* it, thus making it more *practical*. He should find no contradiction in what is simply a logical extension, as will be shown below.

When I ran a series on the *middle course* sometime last year, Biakolo

confronted me. He charged that I was seeking a compromise with the ruling class. I saw that it would be a fruitless exercise turning the encounter into a debate on tactics and strategy. I admitted that my proposition was a compromise one. But I appealed to him to see that mine was a tactical, not a strategic, compromise. It was a compromise on our own grounds, an attempt to help us swing away from our marginalised position and sustain some measure of political continuity — without making a shift of principle.

It was intended as a challenge to the regime to respond to the logic of its own claims. I cannot now say if he was satisfied by my answer, but the gap between us has narrowed, with time.

Sesan Ajayi's article, *In praise of extremism* (January 27) was an angry denunciation of the "extreme acceptance of accomplished facts in almost all spheres: religious, political and literary." He called for "extremism", endorsing the positions held by Biakolo in his *Radical faith*. Ajayi's article neither made an addition to these positions, nor did it clarify them. All it did that was new was to equate Biakolo's *Radical Faith* with *extremism*. It was a tragic climb-down for a delicate discourse that Biakolo had managed to raise to a solid, favourable, sphere.

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SINA Kawonise in his article, *Appraising extremism* (April 5), tried vigorously to theorise extremism. But unfortunately he only succeeded in dragging the debate further away from its political terrain, and us further down. The more he tried, the deeper we fell. He even went as far as contrasting extremism to liberalism—thus adopting the definition of the ruling class. At the end of his brilliant philosophical excursion, he admitted a dilemma: To support or oppose extremism? What a pity! Had he adopted the category maximum, he would not have had any problem endorsing our right to make maximum demands or initiate maximum action. I shall come back to this.

Biokolo responded on April 20 with the article *Extremism and the politics of ogre*. Since he is a central subject in my present article, I shall again stay longer with him. He made four propositions. First: That liberalism is an attitude; that it is not an ideology, but that it can be *ideologised*. If by this he meant—as I hope—that liberalism is an (ideological) *element* which can combine with other elements to form an ideology, then I agree completely. Second: He observed that “among a class of critics and commentators, the greater concern is no longer with substantive issues, but with matters of method and approach.” Third: That it is not liberalism that provides the context for extremism. Rather, that “it is merely

individual societies that provide specific contexts in which any extremism can be understood”. Fourth: “The constitutive nature of intervention by public writing must now change. In line with a shift in the strategies of power, we must now indeed re-focus the counteractive style of the struggle. Rather than merely react, it is now indeed time to interpret”. And, if I may add, from interpretation we must move to effect a change. For philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; “the point, however, is to change it” (Marx).

If allowance is made for my opinion on the ideological status of liberalism and my regret that Biakolo was still operating with the category “extremism (instead of maximum, then I endorse his propositions.

Wale Olaitan's *Extremism: Beyond self-righteousness* (April 27) and Kunle Amuwo's *Extremism: A further exploration* (May 20) and, of course, Sina Kawonise's article (considered above), would be brilliant papers in a faculty seminar. I recommend them. But as contributions to the subject under consideration, I shall go to their concluding paragraphs. Olaitan: “Let the point, therefore he made: The fact that Biakolo engages in passionate condemnation of what he believes is wrong does not make him an extremist, but neither does logical treatise make Onyeoziri or Kawonise a renegade to the struggle. The liberal temper accommodates and

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and even encourages the two and others to thrive...”. Amowu: “Since our world is a relative one there can be no extremism save as a predating prefix used by its conceivers to label a tribe of analysts in order to put them to shame”.

Titi Adepitan's *Columnists at work* (May 23) was a critique of “literary extremism”. He accused Nigerian columnists of lacking the liberal temper, and being too serious and arrogant. He advised: “A columnist is more likely to be retiring and circumspect if he defines his brief as consisting of conscientizing the people, and this we must insist, needs no programmatic declarations on temper or proclamation of ideological credos”. This is a piece of professional advice to columnists. Really, it does not fit in here since we are discussing politics, not journalism. But I included it for the sake of completeness, since it is obvious he is referring to contributors to this debate.

We may now pull together and paraphrase the main contentions of this debate; and briefly comment on them.

Contention 1: The situation in the country has become so bad that a reprieve depends critically on radical action and faith in ourselves. Our denunciation of this unacceptable reality must be radical and uncompromising. There is really nothing

to dispute in this proposition if it is advanced in this way. *Contention 2: Some of our erstwhile comrades have abandoned the struggle through compromises. Some others have toned down their literary struggle, or have simply kept quiet. Yet others have shifted their concern from substantive issues to issues of styles, modes methods and temper of criticism.*

The problem with this proposition is that it is too general, too abstract. If the debaters had been more political and had been guided by a less nebulous political and organisational objective they would have appreciated the need to be concrete and painstaking in criticism of compatriots (or is it comrades?). For committed radicals are so few and so atomised; many of our compatriots are weighed down by SAP and other problems, many are disillusioned and confused; many suffer the consequences of isolation and individualism. Others are under severe moral and political pressure, to say nothing of family pressure. Not all these compatriots have “abandoned” the struggle.

One objective of criticism of compatriots should be to reverse negative and harmful trends, not to destroy allies. But let the point be clear. There is no general rule on language of political criticism. On each occasion the language is determined and conditioned by the political, ideological and organisational

objectives. Unless a critic is merely waging a moral struggle—and not a political one—he or she must in closing put the objective in view. The language of someone who, through criticism of compatriots, aims at educating and uniting for collective and effective political action will be different from that of a “comrade” who merely wants to score a moral point against an opponent. It is unpatriotic and criminal to *unnecessarily* and *irresponsibly* weaken the solidarity of the radical movement through the use of language; it is criminal to use for a compatriot the same weapon and language that the enemy uses him.

In this regard, I hold that the radicals' attitudes to Tai Solarin and Wole Soyinka has been grievously mistaken and irresponsible. I admit that the former committed a serious political error; but the later merely made an ideological slip. But these could have been corrected and our solidarity strengthened had we been more responsible in our approach. But the method adopted by some radicals against these fighters widened the gap, and drove Solarin to self-defeating rebellion. For had we managed the conflict more responsibly, he would not have dared say that he now

However, by conducting our disagreements in this fashion, we have lost heavily, and nothing—absolutely nothing—has been gained.

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Radical faith and permanent struggle (5)

THE general conception of struggle among radicals, as I have earlier said, is too narrow; it is infantile; it is sectarian. Many radicals are not only buried in their particular modes of struggle (writing articles and books, staging plays, providing legal defence, lecturing, protests etc); they also believe that these particular modes of struggle and the ones they approve are the only permissible or revolutionary modes. They think little of organisational unity, coordination, elimination and resolution of contradictions, deepening of understanding, formulation of political platforms, construction of the means of ensuring elementary continuity at all times and under all condition, etc. They reduce internal ideological struggles — whose resolutions could further strengthen the movement — to abstract moral disputations; they reduce political struggles against the ruling class to battles of words only. They turn the entire struggle into threatre to entertain the bourgeoisie.

The third contention of *extremism* debates which we have been reviewing can be paraphrased as follows: *Since everything, including our knowledge, is relative and since there are always two sides to a question, and since our opinion may be wrong we have to adopt the liberal temper in stating our views and in criticising the views of others.* I do not understand what this type of abstract and incapacitating philosophy is doing in a concrete political discourse. This is where our political marginalisation has landed us! The bourgeoisie and their intellectual

mouth-pieces must be having a good laugh. My comments are two.

First, this contention is impermissible in confrontation with an ideological or political opponent. If you think your opponent may be right then shut up, go back and do your home-work and speak or act only when you are sure. Think of the absurdity of allowing the possibility that the supporters of SAP may be right. Among compatriots and even in newspaper articles, the "liberal temper" as the debaters call it, may be a desirable attitude especially in general and preliminary discussions. But at a certain stage in a discussion, when action is contemplated, doubt is no longer permissible. For instance, one could allow the "liberal temper" in discussions about the physical conditions under which the Maroko people lived. But once it became clear that Lagos State Government was contemplating or had decided to destroy the place, "liberal temper" was no longer permissible. One had to take a definite position.

It is very difficult, and it can happen only in rare cases, to take effective political action or oppose an action from the premise that the other side may be right! Such an attitude can exist only on the level of thought, idle thought.

On the substantive philosophical contention formulated above, I only have to say: In the sphere of knowledge, there are the *known* and the *unknown*. There is no *unknowable*. What is unknown today may be known tomorrow. But nothing is unknowable. Human

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beings intervene in the historical process *everyday* on the basis of what is known. They do not wait until tomorrow — when everything, or more things, will be known — to take action today! In the course of intervention in the historical process, human actors get to know more. And on the basis of this new knowledge, they take new actions, some of which may even reverse some earlier actions. That is the way history moves.

The character of the debate reviewed above would have been different — that is if the debate was necessary at all — had two things been done by at least one of the disputants. First, if a context which is at once historical, ideological and political had been established; and second, if the origin and history of the attitude (or ideology) called extremism had been sought out. We begin with the latter. In what follows I shall replace "extremist" with "maximalist" or "maximum"; while "extremism" will be replaced with "maximalist temperament" or "maximum programme" — depending on the context. The reason for these shifts will become clear as we proceed.

The maximalist temperament and maximum programme have their origin in anti-capitalist philosophies and politics. But the variants slanderously labelled "extremist" are specifically Marxist in origin. And it is with these variants that we deal. Let us go briefly into the history of maximalist language in Marxist criticism.

Very early in their revolutionary and literary career, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels emphasised the categorical imperative of uncompromising criticism. In his book *The Holy Family or a Critique of Critical Criticism*, written in (1844-1845), Marx said: "Since it is not for us to create a plan for the future that should hold for all time, all the more surely, what we contemporaries have to do is the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results, nor conflict with the powers-that-be".

A year earlier in his book *A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx had described the working class, the vanguard of the struggle against capitalism as "a class with *radical* chains, a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society, a class that has a universal character because of its universal sufferings and lays claim to no particular right because it is the object of no particular injustice but of injustice in general...."

The *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, or the *Communist Manifesto* is the best known text in marxist and socialist literature. It is simultaneously one of the oldest and one of the freshest. It is also the most popular and the most widely read. It is in language one of the most accessible socialist texts, and the most *direct* in political message. It is the most fundamental, the most sweeping and the most penetrating in analysis. It is at once very concise, and exhaustive, touching as it were, all departments of marxism and socialist revolution: Philosophy,

history, programme, strategy and tactics, etc. In other words, the

Communist Manifesto contains all the pillars and main principles of marxism, socialism and communism.

Since the text is also eminently polemical, and unmatched in elegance the Communist Manifesto has continued to serve as a power-

ful ideological weapon in the struggle against capitalism and bourgeois reaction. By marxist standards the text is brief, taking less than 12,000 words. Every entrant to the socialist movement, via marxism, starts his or her education with it. It is thus the basic text of marxist and socialist education. Every drafter of a socialist programme must refer to it. It is inconceivable that an important marxist or socialist paper, whether academic or agitational, can be written anywhere in the world without a reference to the *Communist Manifesto*. Those who call it the "Bible" of socialism may have some point, provided they bear this distinction in mind: *The Manifesto is not sacred. It can be criticised by Marxists; the ideas and conclusions in it are subject to modifications and development.*

This introduction to the Communist Manifesto is necessary because the text is unmatched in denunciatory and maximalist language. As we shall see next week each of its sentences spits fire. Nothing which some of our radicals have written is comparable to the mildest sentence in the Manifesto. And yet, we approve of the latter and disapprove the former.

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Radical faith and permanent struggle (6)

IN the closing paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels said: "Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of the existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose, but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries unite!" Earlier in the same book Marx and Engels answered those who accused communists of "desiring to abolish countries and nationality." To these critics they answered: "The working people have no country. We cannot take from them what they have got."

These are maximalist statements *par excellence*. In comparison with them Biakolo's, and for that matter, Ajayi's maximalist temperament fades into insignificance. The ideological justification of this maximalism is that the working people's maximum programme is for the creation of entirely new society, not for tinkering with the existing one under which the masses are mere objects of untold exploitation. Furthermore since the working people suffer all types of injustice under, the present social order, they have no reason to resort to selective criticism. And finally, since marxists are adherents of historical and dialectical materialism, they know that everything that exists, in-

cluding the future socialist order, will pass away and be replaced by another. Hence should any undesirable consequence result from their criticism, this will also be negated. Only the bourgeois dream of creating a social order that will last for ever.

But in adopting a maximalist position, marxists proceed to indicate an *alternative*, and how it can be attained. In this regard marxists are different from anarchists who also engage in maximalist pronouncement. First, marxists hold that the emancipation of the working people will be carried by the working people themselves under the leadership of revolutionary communist. Anarchists believe in the emancipatory mission of small sects of revolutionaries. Second, marxists hold that the working people cannot emancipate themselves without at the same time emancipating the entire society. Third, marxists hold that the emancipating of society from all forms of exploitation and injustice will pass through several stages. Marx, in particular, identified two stages of communism: The lower stage and the higher stage (see his Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875)).

Fourth, marxists hold that under certain circumstance, reforms beneficial to the working people can be forced out of the bourgeoisie. The programme of extracting reforms from the bourgeoisie is called the *minimum* programme. The maximum

programme is for the overthrow of the bourgeois class. Marx and Engels however warned that communists must, in all stages of the struggle, "represent the interests of the (working class) movement as a whole" and strive to "clearly understand the line of march, the condition, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement".

In other words, marxists support only those reforms that improve the material well-being of the masses and *simultaneously* place them in a stronger political and ideological position to continue the struggle. And this struggle is permanent. This is how Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*: "Communists fight for the attainment of immediate aims, for the enforcement of momentary interests of the working class: but in the movement of the present they also represent and take care of the future of that movement." This is a statement of the dialectical relationship between the minimum and maximum programmes as well as that of permanent struggle.

Finally marxists hold that in certain circumstances, tactical alliances are necessary and possible.

Marxists adopt the maximalist posture in their criticism of the

bourgeoisie. But they also criticise one another. The aims of the latter are at least implicit in the criticism. They include: to expose an ideological or political error which is capable of influencing the popular masses or deflecting the main question; to clarify a situation or a line of march that is becoming blurred; and to expose opportunism. The severity of the criticism depends on the situation: the seriousness of the perceived error and the state of the movement and the struggle. Hear what Leon Trotsky said of Kautsky, Engels' undisputed successor as leader of the marxist movement:

"Kautsky resembles the miserable school master who, for many years has been repeating a description of spring to his pupils within the four walls of his stuffy schoolroom, and when at last, at the sunset of his days as a teacher, he comes out into the fresh air, does not recognise spring... and rises to prove that spring is not spring not after all but only a great disorder in nature, because it is taking place against the laws of nature."

Trotsky are referring to Kautsky's attitude to the Bolshevik revolution. Anyone who wishes to study marxist criticism of comrades should check out the works of Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Eskor Toyo Segun Osoba, Bala Usman, Biodun Jeyifo, the late Mahmud Tukur, to

name a few. Critics may not always be right, but only through maximum criticism can dangerous trends be blocked. When marxist critics are proved wrong, they are expected to carry out maximalist self-criticism.

Let us return once again to the key concepts of this series, namely, *Radical Faith* and *Permanent Struggle*. The former has been defined by Biakolo (*The Guardian*, January 5). It means that type of faith which refuses to seek accommodation with injustice,

however powerful the perpetrators may be. The inadequacy of this concept is taken care of by the second concept, permanent struggle.

In brief, permanent struggle means that struggle which moves from one stage to another, whose every stage is anchored on to the preceding one; a struggle which is not atomised, but rather co-ordinated; which is multi-dimensional and at once global and national; a struggle which is informed by a clear theory. The permanent struggle is that struggle which does not stop at the bourgeois-reform stage, however progressive, which goes from popular-democratic demands to revolutionary-socialist demands, a struggle which can only end with the elimination from the surface of the earth, of all forms of man's inhumanity to man.

• To be concluded next week

Radical faith and permanent struggle (7)

WE shall conclude this series of articles by outlining what we believe to be the immediate political tasks of Nigerian radicals — leftist radicals, to be specific: For non-leftist radicals are simply fascists. My position remains essentially as it was articulated in the concluding instalment of my earlier series *The Middle Course*. But this position needs to be updated.

The challenge before Nigerian radical and revolutionary forces proceeds directly from the present marginalised, atomised and pathetic state of its political existence. The challenge, as I see it, is straightforward, though by no means simple. Its core is to abandon infantilism, play-acting, opportunism, careerism, sectarianism, abstract radicalism and self-destructive internal squabbles and enter, or re-enter, the national political arena as an organised and united movement: A radical and nationally-based movement whose strategy is focused not just on the need for increased harassment of the bourgeois state but on political power.

The starting-point, of course, should be the formation of a Pan-Nigerian democratic platform, the creation of which was attempted in Calabar in 1981 (Nigerian Democratic Movement, NDM) and then in Lagos in July 1989 (Popular Democratic Front). Both attempts, and perhaps others, were killed by

uniquely Nigerian left-wing maladies which had assailed us for too

long. In this renewed attempt to form such a front, radicals will be exercising their democratic rights, and will therefore be protected by the Nigerian Constitution, the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on Human Rights, the Charter of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Charter and various declarations of the United Nations, and other human rights and democratic conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory. And President Babangida — being the current Head of the OAU, cannot permit a violation of our democratic rights. The democratic mood in the world supports the exercise of our democratic rights. Beyond that, it is in the interest of the nation to have such a democratic front.

The popular Democratic Front should bring together all democratic and radical forces, namely, popular-democratic groups, human rights organisations and radical mass organisations of workers, students, women, peasants, professionals, academics and artists. The Front must, from its inception, renounce the sectarianism, disposition to slander, intolerance, dishonesty, opportunism, and dogmatism of its predecessors. No-one, and no one group, should be allowed to place a sectarian condition on membership. The seeds of proprietorship or “god-fatherism” must never be sown in the Front.

There are not, and there need not be, irreconcilable contradictions

By Edwin Madunagu

between the purely popular-democratic and human rights struggle and the more radical struggle to restructure the society. I am convinced more than ever before that in our own case, the case of Nigeria in the 1990s, the democratic struggle is a radical struggle. For the democratic struggle leads directly to the fundamental restructuring of the social order, and nowhere else.

It is precisely because the democratic struggle in Nigeria has no other mission except the radical restructuring of the social order that those who are in the leadership of the heavily factionalised democratic forces must be supremely responsible, tolerant and disciplined. And to be responsible and disciplined is not just to be consistently militant but also to be appreciative of the dimensions and complexity of the democratic movement. Rather than being buried in their particular modes of struggle, radicals must recognise the need for a co-ordination of the various dimensions of our struggle at every level.

The democratic forces in Nigeria must recognise and appreciate the need for firm, but corrective criticism and disciplined internal dialogue as means of uprooting dangerous ideological and political trends within the movement. Every criticism — whether internal or directed at the other side — must have an aim. And the aim must be positive. Each act of criticism must

seek to unite and strengthen, not to divide and weaken.

This does not mean that unprincipled liberalism should be adopted. Take, for instance, the battle which Karl Marx waged against Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809—1865) in the European workers' movement in the middle of the last century. Proudhon, a French economist and journalist, was at first, quite influential in the movement. But he was what could be called a petit-bourgeois socialist, an anarchist whose views were quite harmful to the movement.

In 1846 Proudhon wrote a book, *The Philosophy of Poverty*, which he thought was a masterpiece in the ideological arsenal of the movement. Enthusiastically he asked Marx, his close friend, to write a review of the book, saying: “I await your severe criticism.” Karl Marx, in 1847 produced a review in form of another book, titled *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

Here is the foreword to Marx's review: “Proudhon has the misfortune of being peculiarly misunderstood in Europe. In France, he has the right to be a bad economist, because he is reputed to be a good German philosopher. In Germany he has the right to be a bad German philosopher, because he is reputed to be one of the ablest of French economists. Being both a German and an economist at the same time we desire to protest against this double error”. In other words, Marx claimed, that Proudhon — the

previously acclaimed philosopher and economist was neither. And he went on to demonstrate this in his review. As Marx later recalled this review ended his friendship with Proudhon “for ever”. Out of modesty Marx failed to say that his review strengthened the movement by laying to rest the ghost of Proudhonism. This is the type of criticism that radicals should adopt.

There must however be a simultaneous attempt to go beyond the formation of a democratic front. Drawing heavily on the lessons of the present revolution and counter-revolution in the world, Nigerian radicals and patriots should think seriously about the need to establish a nationally-based socialist formation in Nigeria. The formation should be part of the Popular Democratic Front. It must be committed to the mobilisation of the working and toiling people of Nigeria for the struggle for socialism.

My call, in short, is for the construction of a platform, a pan-Nigerian democratic and radical platform which should stand uncompromisingly for human rights, democratic rights, genuine multi-party democracy, women's liberation, full employment, secularity of the state, national equality and radical internationalism. The political strategy is to bring the people's victory nearer and simultaneously minimise the suffering of our people and shorten the list of martyrs.

• *Concluded*