

Neo-fascism as guided democracy (1)

USE the term *neo-fascism* as a provisional designation for the form of state which has been evolving in Nigeria since the present regime came to power on August 27, 1985. This form of state has *some* features in common with three state-forms which have appeared in modern history, namely, Bonapartism, fascism and populism.

We shall later in this series examine the economic bases and historical development of neo-fascism in Nigeria. For now we only have to underline the fact that neo-fascism is neither a policy nor an autonomous decision of the military regime. It was a product of, and is still rooted in, a severe national crisis which is economic, social and political. The crisis which started in the early 1980s produced this regime and the historical mission, or strategy, of the latter is to resolve the crisis in a particular *anti-people* way. The anti-human phenomenon which we are witnessing goes beyond General Babangida. If and when this regime goes there will be a struggle between the forces which had developed under it and popular-democratic forces.

Neo-fascism is not a guided democracy in Nigeria or elsewhere. It is not a democracy of any type. It is a cynical dictatorship. To defeat this dictatorship it has to be studied, not just abused and denounced. Its historical roots, development, nature, character and characteristic features, and tendencies must be apprehended. We

start by listing the main features:

Neo-fascist movement: We have to bear in mind here that a movement is not simply a single physical organisation. A political movement is the aggregate of a definite set of ideas or ideologies, practices and physical organisations and individuals. At a certain point in its development a political movement acquires a vanguard to coordinate and direct its various strands.

A neo-fascist movement now exists in Nigeria. Its ideas are embodied in the supportive philosophy and theories of the present transition programme as presented to us on daily basis in official news reports and media propaganda, books, newspaper articles, speeches, addresses and advertisements. The neo-fascist organisations are the *Association for a Better Nigeria*; the *Third Eye*; the anti-democratic factions and tendencies in the SDP and NRC; state and private institutions, groups and individuals that seek either to draft the military president to contest the presidential election or to make him extend his tenure beyond August 27, 1993; the anti-democratic groups that will soon emerge in the National Assembly and the State Legislatures. The fascist vanguard is the military dictatorship. The fascist movement's strategic political aim is the institutionalisation of diarchy with the civilian component as an inferior partner.

Subversion, division and atomisation of mass organisation: In the

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past few years the nation has witnessed systematic attacks on, and subversion of the unity of, mass organisations including the industrial unions, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and its member-unions, as well as human rights organisations, pro-democracy groups, political groupings, movements for the protection of minority rights, etc.

Neo-populism or the incorporation of organisations of the civil society: The nation is also witnessing a simultaneous effort to incorporate the organisations of the civil society, or at least their leaderships, into the state machine. The organisations include the labour unions and their apex organization, the NLC, cultural organisations, foundations, etc.

State terrorism, lawlessness and arbitrariness: We have been witnessing the steady rise of this phenomenon.

Institutions of control and regimentation: These include, in addition to the regular forces, the SDII; SIIB; SSS; DMI; DIA; Special Tribunals, National Guard; National Commission on Inter-Governmental Relations; Centre for Democratic Studies; BLP; NEC and of course the two parties, SDP and NRC.

Production of hegemonic ideologies: We note here that a class, a

fraction of a class or a regime is hegemonic "not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonisms is neutralised." (Erenstou Laclau).

In this sense, the hegemonic ideologies or ideological elements so far produced under, and by, this regime are embodied in President Babangida's broadcast on assuming power on August 27, 1985; budget speech, January 1986; address at the inauguration of the Political Bureau, January 13, 1986; inauguration of the Transition Programme, July 1987; Kuru speech, October 1988; speech on the occasion of receiving the Constituent Assembly's Report and lifting of the ban on partisan activities, May 1989; broadcast dissolving the 13 political parties and setting up SDP and NRC, October 7, 1989; National Day broadcast, October 1, 1991; broadcast, extending the transition, November 17, 1992; address at the inauguration of the National Assembly, December 5, 1992; speech at the dissolution of the AFRC and the inauguration of the Transitional Council, December 31, 1992; address at Abuja "National Conference" January 18, 1993, etc.

These speeches, statements, addresses and broadcasts, together with the actions which they justified, con-

tain elements of the ideologies of fascism, populism and bonapartism. The essence of fascism is the destruction of all centres of popular-democratic opposition; that of populism is the incorporation, into the state, of popular-democratic organisations or their leaderships; and that of bonapartism is the presentation of the state as an institution standing above classes and particular interests, but representing the national interest. This regime emerged as a bona-partist one, but then went on to acquire fascist and populist features. We characterise the product as it appears today as neo-fascism. It is a new form of state in Nigeria.

There are four possible ways the neo-fascist movement in Nigeria can develop in the immediate future. It can field some of its members as presidential candidates and get one of them to win. In that case the new president will immediately move to formalise the neo-fascist rule. The neo-fascist movement can also seize power "constitutionally" through the National Assembly and the SDP and NRC. If the movement discovers that it cannot achieve either of these two by August 27, then it will work for a further extension of the transition. The fourth possibility, that of a coup d'état, carries the greatest danger for the survival of the country. But the neo-fascist movement may attempt it if the foundations and structures under construction are threatened.

● To be concluded next week.

THE guiding hypothesis in this series can be split into three: That the Nigerian state has been under-going a major transformation since the present regime came to power in 1985; that to understand what has happened, and is happening, to the civil society — and in particular why the latter has become so docile and anomic — one has to understand the nature and character of this transformation; and that unless the radical forces in Nigeria understand this transformation and act on it their struggle to institute a multi-party democracy will not enter the decisive phase.

In the last instalment I provisionally designated the emergent Nigerian state as *neo-fascism* and summarised its main features. From that summary one can draw the immediate conclusion that the task before the Nigerian people is not simply the termination of military rule, although the latter appears as the first stage. The task is the defeat of the neo-fascist state as it is taking shape before our very eyes. In this perspective the termination of military rule appears as a moment in a process. It follows that the inauguration of a civilian regime in August, although a legitimate national objective, may not lead to the defeat of neo-fascism whose

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foundations have been laid and are being strengthened — even as the new transition programme is being executed. The criticism of the transition programme must therefore be deepened to become the criticism of neo-fascism.

Since the nature and character of a particular state are reflected in the way it performs the functions of the-state-in-general, we may apprehend the nature of the transformation under discussion by studying the changes in the ways the Nigerian state has been discharging its functions.

Earnest Mandel, in his work *Late Capitalism*, summarised the functions of the state, any state, as follows:

- To mediate the relationship between the various factions or sections of the ruling class and represent their common interest;

- To put down any threat to the prevailing mode of production from the dominated classes or particular sections of the dominant classes, by means of the army, police, security agencies, judiciary and prison-system;

- To integrate, by means of the ideologies of the ruling class, the dominated classes and groups

thereby ensuring a cohesive society; and

- To provide those general conditions of production which cannot be assured by the private activities of the members of the dominant classes.

These have been the functions of the Nigerian state since independence. In particular, they are the functions of the present Nigerian state, the neo-fascist state. But the means of discharging these functions have changed qualitatively since August 1985. Underlying these changes which were listed in the first part of this article are objective historical factors which include:

- The economic crisis (which still persists).

- Increasing pauperisation of sections of the middle classes;

- The national political crisis which started soon after Shehu Shagari assumed the presidency in 1979;

- The unresolved National Question;

- The international situation, that is, the right-ward shift in the international balance of forces.

At the subjective level the regime has fashioned new instruments to

build up the neo-fascist state. These include:

- Generous donations and gifts;
- Pattern of appointments to public office;

- Attitude to past leaders, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo, Yakubu Gowon, Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Shagari;

- Neutralisation of political groups, politicians and activists;

- Personal warmth of General Ibrahim Babangida;

- Campaign against "extremists" and "radicals";

- Unpredictability of the regime and its leadership;

- Pattern of recruitment of political support, especially from the Southern part of the country;

- Concentration of strategic coercive institutions;

- Purges of coercive apparatuses of state by various means;

- Subversion of mass organisations and professional groups and communities through co-optation of their leaderships and promotion of personal ambitions,

- State terrorism and blackmail;

- Physical movement of the seat of the Federal Government to Abuja

The neo-fascist movement supports the present economic system and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which is its core principle. It supports capitalism; im-

perialist domination, privatisation and commercialisation; drastic reduction or elimination of social services, except those that benefit the power-bloc exclusively; market economy and philosophy of "smaller government".

Politically, neo-fascism accepts and promotes the institutionalisation of diarchy and regimentation of the political life of the nation. Neo-fascism is thoroughly undemocratic, lawless, terroristic and cynical.

On the national question, neo-fascism accepts the present structure of relationship between the nationalities and its hierarchy of rights, privileges and powers.

It is possible, for anyone who is so inclined, to trace the actual evolution of the neo-fascist state. To do this it is sufficient to trace the trajectory of this regime, beginning from August 1985 when it came to power. In practical terms this means identifying landmark events, signalling shifts from what was generally believed or proclaimed as the goal of the transition programme; paying attention to the regime's policies and actions and its attitudes to the three main questions confronting the nation, namely, the *Democratic Question*, the *National Question* and the *Class/Human Question*.

● *Concluded*

● *Next week: Trajectory of neo-fascism.*