

Notes on the power-blocs (1)

By Edwin Madunagu

but to be the instrument of the hegemonic faction within the Oligarchy. Babangida's faction lost out in the battle but its parent body, the Northern Oligarchy, is still in power.

Babangida aborted the June 12 Presidential Elections not simply because the winner was a Yoruba political leader and a candidate of the Western power-bloc. Knowing fully well that Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola does not, politically, belong to the mainstream of the Western power-bloc and that the Bashorun was the best ally from that bloc that the rival Northern Oligarchy could ever get, Babangida would have allowed him to assume the presidency — but for a certain factor.

Babangida knew, or felt, that there were political forces in support of Abiola's presidency which regarded his inauguration merely as a stepping-stone for a radical restructuring of the country's polity and economy, a prelude to the overthrow of the Northern Oligarchy and the bases of its power in the country. Abiola therefore had to be prevented — with all the risks involved — in order to deny power to these "dangerous" forces, most of which were outside the control of the two parties.

The annulment of the election exploded the illusions of the two-party system, and exposed both the huge opportunism that characterised the composition of the parties, espe-

cially the SDP, and the bankruptcy of the so-called political class. While the Western power-bloc, the leading bloc of the SDP at first stood firm behind Abiola's victory, the other factions and groups started vacillating and finally abandoned the mandate. Eventually the Western power-bloc itself became divided over *the way forward*: While the bloc was united in opposition to Ernest Shonekan's Interim National Government (ING) it was divided in its attitude to Abacha-Diya-Ali coup d'état which ushered the Second Dictatorship. It is now known that that coup was a joint programme of fractions of the Northern Oligarchy, fractions of the Western power-bloc and elements of the Radical Movement. But predictably, the Northern Oligarchy has re-established its absolute control.

Now that the illusion and deception which produced the Abacha-Diya-Ali coup have been exploded, the politicians of the various power-blocs have retreated to their "natural homes," expressing the interests of their blocs as crudely as possible. Not only are the power-blocs struggling to *consolidate* their powers, they are also struggling to absorb fractions of the Left and the Radical Movement into their political horizons. Thus, on the critical question of restructuring the polity, the Northern Oligarchy and some Northern radicals are in strategic agreement: No restructuring is necessary. They also do not believe that a Constitu-

tional Conference or any other Conference, is necessary.

The Western power-bloc wants the Constitutional Conference, or preferably, the Sovereign National Conference (SNC), as a vehicle for achieving a "power parity" with the Northern Oligarchy or gaining control of the West in a regional set-up that will open up the prospects of mutually-beneficial working relations with other regions and power-blocs. Thus for the Western power-bloc the demand for the restructuring of the polity into six or eight regions is not a position that cannot be abandoned or negotiated out. They are "bargaining" or "fall-back" positions.

The other power-blocs, the minor ones, are still unclear about their maximum and minimum positions. This is a reflection of their weakness as political aggregates. While the Eastern power-bloc cannot be said to feel strongly about the Constitutional Conference or the demand for restructuring — being more concerned, as before, with constructing winning alliances — the blocs in the Southern minorities are still vague about the content and form of self-determination. Beyond that, these blocs have not addressed the problem of popular sovereignty or popular democracy in the restructured polity. They seem not to be aware that there are internal social forces that are committed to preventing the ethnic minorities from becoming mere reproductions of the present Nigerian social formation.

To be concluded next week

THE unenviable business of following the political struggles in Nigeria now compels us to study the political aggregates called **power-blocs** more closely. For it is these power-blocs that shape the activities of the so-called political class.

A power-bloc is an aggregate of social forces either in power, or pushing for power, in the country or in segments of it. Power-blocs are constituted by *social classes* and *fractions of social classes*, reflecting the multiple modes of production that define a social formation. Thus a power-bloc in Nigeria has capitalists, feudalists, compradors, commission agents, senior army officers, professionals, intellectuals, bureaucrats, politicians, religious leaders, leaders of fraternities and cults, etc, as fractions and constituents. Hegemony in virtually all the power-blocs in Nigeria is exercised by capitalists, compradors and commission agents. All the power-blocs are to the right of the ideological-political spectrum.

Nigeria's power-blocs are regionally-based. Put differently, there are no nationally-based power-blocs in Nigeria. It is unfortunate, but inevitable, that Nigeria's dominant classes from which the power-blocs are constituted and reproduced have not been able to transcend their regional origins. Only the *left* can constitute a national or trans-ethnic power-bloc. But this bloc is yet to emerge. The blocs that exist, namely, the Category A blocs (the Northern Oligarchy and the Western power-bloc) and the Category B blocs (including the Eastern power-

bloc and the blocs in the Delta and the Middle-Belt) are all regionally-based.

The greatest illusion created by Babangida's two-party system was that it would lead to the construction of two nationally-based power-blocs one a little to the left and the other a little to the right and both democratically alternating the exercise of power or hegemony in the country. Hard experience has now taught us the following: One, that the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was essentially the party of the Western power-bloc; two, that the National Republican Convention (NRC) was the party of the Northern power-bloc; three, that the Category B power-blocs and marginalised fractions of the dominant classes had to reconcile themselves with marginal positions within the parties; and four, that both parties were right-wing.

Many political analysts once believed that Babangida was constructing a new power-bloc in Nigeria through his economic and political programmes. The new power-bloc which would be *national* would then supplant the Northern Oligarchy as the dominant power-bloc in Nigeria. Again hard experience has taught us that Babangida was only trying to construct a hegemonic faction within the Northern Oligarchy. The neofascist dictatorship which his regime tried to construct was not meant to be independent of the Northern Oligarchy

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EVERY serious political movement is compelled, for ideological reasons, to claim to be committed to democracy. For history has so far furnished no stronger ideological language in the struggle for power. It is thus not surprising that all the power-blocs and political forces in Nigeria lay claim to the democratic platform. But in reality, democracy is alien to Nigeria's ruling and dominant classes and the power-blocs that are constructed from them.

A political movement's democratic claim is judged by its positions on concrete political issues not by what it says about itself. In Nigeria, three of such issues are the national question; the question of political right to form parties; and the question of social rights. These are all questions of democracy in the context of our country. None of Nigeria's power-blocs is categorical on the right of the Nigerian people to a minimum standard of living or their rights to form political parties and contest for power or their right to fight for democratic resolution of the national question.

Those members of the power-blocs who pretend to be worried about the concentration of political power at the centre, or in an ethnic group or region, merely propose the "rotational presidency" or the "parliamentary system". They ignore the really democratic solution, namely, the Collective Presidency where power is shared continuously. The "radical" bourgeois politicians who subscribe to the regional restructuring of the polity, propose a federation of six re-

gions or zones — three in the North and three in the South. In the new structure, the minority nationalities will again be in the minority, occupying two regions, while the three dominant nationalities will continue to be dominant — with four regions. A Nigerian power-bloc accepts a system as democratic only to the extent that its adoption promises to shift the balance of forces in its favour. Otherwise it is either not democratic or is "alien" or "academic".

Nigeria's power-blocs do not exhaust or nearly exhaust, the active social forces in the country. Each power-bloc is opposed by groups of social forces from the right and from the left. The Northern power-bloc is opposed not only by the Western power-bloc but also by the radical forces, ethnic minority movements, religious movements and possibly detachments of the Armed Forces. The Western power-bloc is opposed not only by the Northern power-bloc and some forces in the East but also by the Radical Movement, the Nigerian Left and ethnic minority movements.

Not all the "non power-bloc" political forces are more democratic or progressive than the power-blocs. Some "non power-bloc" social forces are in fact fascist. But attention is focused on the power-blocs because they are the dominant forces and their attitudes and dispositions will determine the immediate direction of our struggle.

Notes on the power-blocs (2)

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Now, to the future. And we may proceed by way of *prognoses*.

*The Constitutional Conference, having been made inevitable by the struggle between the power-blocs, the latter will now shift their attention to its constitution. But the dominant power-bloc, the Northern Oligarchy, will, in addition to the *Politics of the Constitutional Conference*, continue to guard, and prepare for use, the state power it now controls. The power-blocs are therefore not entering the Constitutional Conference battle from the same position (of weakness).

*Of all the power-blocs in Nigeria, the Northern Oligarchy knows best the meaning of political power and the reality of state power. Suffering no illusions (like its opponents) and regarding politics as a serious business (and not a game), the Northern Oligarchy has used this superior consciousness — and of course its control of state power — to divide its bourgeois enemies and retain power. This advantage (consciousness and state power) will again be used both in the election/nomination into the Constitutional Conference, and in its deliberations and the construction of alliances in the Conference.

*The election of delegates into the Conference will, like elections during Babangida's transition, be domi-

nated by money and influenced by malpractices of several types — official and unofficial. Nothing has happened to make us expect otherwise. On the contrary, the role of money will increase this time around on account of the deepening poverty of the masses, and extra-legal interference will increase on account of the high political stakes involved. The government will use its power of nomination to depress the radical content of the Conference.

The outcome of the election and the composition of the Assembly are therefore predictable. The implication here is that radicals, leftists and authentic representatives of ethnic nationalities will be marginalised. Time will show whether they will be clear-headed enough to know what to do to increase their political weight beyond what will be suggested by their numerical strength in the Conference.

*Since the strategic battle in the Conference will be the battle of alliances, the main power-blocs (the Northern Oligarchy and the Western power-bloc) will move quickly into building up two broad alliances. The minor power-blocs and "free-lance" delegates will be the "beautiful brides", and nothing has changed to make us expect that they will be less mercenary than they were during Babangida's transition.

*The battle in the Constitutional Conference will therefore be, in the first instance, a battle between the Northern Oligarchy, supported by the Nigerian State, and the Western power-bloc, supported by the dissident or "subversive" functionaries of the Nigerian state. (A similar thing happened during the June crisis). The inevitable crisis in the Conference will be resolved either by one of the main power-blocs employing extra-Conference means, or a third Force, a force outside the conference intervening. Whatever happens what is clear is that the crisis *within* the Conference will be resolved *outside* the Conference.

*It will be disastrous for any of the two dominant power-blocs in Nigeria to attempt to destroy the other. For only another Civil War, which ends with Nigeria still remaining one polity, can destroy one of the two dominant power-blocs and leave the country with only one. If the Civil War results in the disintegration of Nigeria then the problem of Nigeria's power-blocs will vanish with Nigeria.

But a radical-democratic revolution can dislodge all the blocs, replace them with an ideological PAN-Nigerian power-bloc, and keep the country united under popular democracy. This resolution ought to have come at least a decade ago, after the collapse of the Second Republic. Although the enterprise is today more difficult and hazardous it must be engaged — for there is no other way forward. For the country to have any chance of survival and regeneration revolution-democratic forces must come to power.

*Concluded.