

OUR focus here is on three political concepts or categories: Nigerian Left, Power Bloc and Dictatorship. The shift of focus to these categories and away from three others, namely Radical Movement, Political Class and Transition Programme, is an indication of the abandonment of some of the perspectives which were employed in this column in 1992 and 1993. Some friends with whom I have discussed the shift are of the opinion that what is happening is a "tightening" of my perspectives. But whether we call the movement a "shift", an "abandonment" or a "tightening," it will lead to important changes in the political advocacy of this column. The perspectives of 1992 and 1993 and the political practices advocated on their bases are now grossly inadequate, as will be demonstrated.

By the Second Dictatorship we mean the stage of Nigeria's political history inaugurated on November 17, 1993 by the coup d'état led by Army Generals Sani Abacha, Oladipo Diya, and Mohammed Chris Ali and supported in the civil society by fractions of the Radical Movement, the "June 12 movement," groups within the non-June 12 SDP and the mainstream of the NRC. The stage succeeded the First Dictatorship which was established on August 27, 1985 and terminated eight years later on August 26, 1993.

The First Dictatorship was General Babangida's dictatorship. The second Dictatorship is the Abacha-Diya-Ali dictatorship. In this perspective, Shonekan's Interim National Government (ING) which lasted from August 26 to November 17, 1993 was

a mere interregnum in a chain of dictatorships.

Two quick comments here. Under the First Dictatorship, Nigerian radicals — or those referred to by the press as radicals — had adopted the terms *transition* and *transition programme* coined by the state ideologues not because they accepted what was being 'engineered' but because they hoped that through a political intervention in the programme they would help ensure that a qualitatively new regime succeeded General Babangida and that the new regime would provide a more favourable condition for the struggle of the popular masses.

That did not happen. Perhaps it was even naive to have entertained the hope. This will be taken up later. But the mistake — if we are inclined to call it so — should not be repeated.

The Second Dictatorship — the present regime — is *transiting* to nowhere; it is simply a dictatorship. It is not a transition to democracy and it is not the inaugurator of a transition to democracy. Its objective or the objective of its conscious core is to nurture the neofascist dictatorship whose roots were laid under Babangida but whose consolidation was briefly disrupted as a result of a tactical mistake by Babangida and his advisers.

The second comment is that the First Dictatorship had three phases whose strategies and tactics political historians ought to research more thoroughly. **First phase:** From August 27, 1985, when Babangida seized power to October 7, 1989, when he proscribed all political parties and estab-

The second dictatorship (1)

By Edwin Madunagu

lished the NRC and SDP.

Second phase: From October 7, 1989 to January 2, 1993 when Babangida swore in a Transitional Council, set up the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) in place of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) and allowed a castrated National Assembly to begin to function.

Third phase: From January 2, 1993 to August 26, 1993.

By Nigeria's power bloc we mean the aggregate of the dominant/ruling classes across the country. Reflecting the country's level of development both as an economy and as a nation, the power bloc has regional, ethnic as well as economic fractions. Although the fractions are in intense competition for hegemony, they have a basic unifying interest, namely, the exploitation and domination of the working and toiling people and — as will be shown later — the deflection of the national question.

The concept of *Left* in politics originated long ago, in Europe, and was first used to designate those members of legislative houses who advocated rapid and radical changes in favour of the *lower classes*; the common people. These members usually sat to the *left* of the presiding officers. Later, the concept was extended to refer to an aggregate of political and ideological tendencies within and outside parliament, which stood for the political emancipation of the lower classes — the working people — through reform or revolutions; or both.

By the end of last century the Left had been firmly established as an id-

ological platform which saw and advocated the *overthrow* of the bourgeois class, by any means appropriate — as a necessary condition for the emancipation of the lower classes. Before the current imperialist campaign of distortion and inversion (of established political categories and concepts), the centre of gravity of the Left had shifted from the power bloc — where it was a mere tendency — to the popular masses where it became an autonomous revolutionary programme and agency.

The point here is that the Left does not simply convey the notion of radicalism in politics. The latter is a political category which, like the Left, originated in Europe and was then transported to America. To be radical in politics is to be drastic or extreme in any direction — Right or Left. It is to be thoroughly rebellious, and to advocate the overturning of existing institutions, views, practices, rules, conditions and methods of governance. The concept is therefore not class-specific. Except where it is qualified by the adjective *leftist* (becoming *leftist radical*) or it qualifies *leftist* (becoming *radical leftist*), the term radical does not refer to the emancipation or empowerment of the popular (or dominated) classes. That is the essence, logic and dynamics of the Radical Movement in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Implicit in this clarification is a criticism of the Nigeria Left, not of the Radical Movement. Historically the Radical Movement has occupied a "buffer-zone" between the organisations of the power-bloc and those of the Left. Essentially its task has been to uphold and defend the basic rights and dignity of the popular masses and

their leaders — as citizens. On the other hand, the Left, while articulating and defending the basic rights of the popular masses, has as its strategic objective the capture of political power.

But what we see in Nigeria is that while the Radical Movement is performing its task, fractions of the Left have simply dissolved into it, putting forward one form of reformist and opportunistic rationalisation or the other. Although the Left has helped to sharpen and radicalise the advocacy of reform — the type that should be acceptable to the power-bloc — it has not influenced the Radical Movement to expand its programmes to include, at least, the criticism of imperialism and the market economy. More tragically the "hibernating" Left appears to be satisfied with the inspiration which the Radical Movement now receives from imperialism which, since 1990, has committed so much energy, technical resources and money to the promotion of vacuous democracy in Nigeria, Africa and the world.

In effect, instead of transforming their allies (the radicals), the leftists are being transformed, ideologically and politically, into radicals of power-bloc politics. In this tragic transformation, they have been unable to articulate the minimum conditions for the overthrow of the dictatorship (in a way that will benefit the popular masses of all nationalities and the internally-colonised people.) Worse than that, they have not been able to recognise such articulations when put forward, in acts or deeds. Radical politics, with leftists as its ideologues, has so far benefited only the disaffected fractions of the power bloc. Nothing demonstrated this better than the coup that inaugurated the Second Dictatorship.

* To be continued next Thursday

IT is in response to the sad situation in the country and the errors of radical politics that shifts have to be made in the struggle against the dictatorship. The Nigerian Left, even in its fractionised state, ought to appreciate now that there was no transition under General Babangida and that the second dictatorship will not initiate any transition. The Radical Movement (the democracy and human rights groups), Reform Movements and disaffected fractions of the power-bloc may therefore continue with the "transition" politics, or the criticism of it, or both. But the task of the Left is to pose the question of rescuing the nation and its peoples from the chain of fake transitions.

What is the Nigerian Left? Here again, our experience in the last five years mandates some definitive shifts. I would simply define a Nigerian Leftist at this point of our history as a radical who is committed to the achievement of popular power and popular self-determination, who is committed to the struggle against imperialism and who actively appreciates that the road to victory passes through revolutionary politics. I shall provisionally call this the "three plus one" definition: Popular power, popular self-determination, anti-imperialism, plus revolutionary politics.

The essence of this definition is its absorption of the revolutionary aspects of progressive concepts such as radical, democracy, pro-democracy, human-rights, secularity of the state, state-

welfarism, women's empowerment, ethnic self-determination, anti-capitalism and socialism etc., which have been used to define progressive and popular politics in the last few years. This absorption is necessary at this point of our struggle because some of the concepts have been near-mortally abused by stalinists and the others by imperialists exploiting the tragedy of Eastern Europe. The "three plus one" definition/programme is a rebirth of these concepts.

The First Dictatorship, or Babangida's transition, benefited immensely from the crisis of the anti-capitalist movement and the upsurge of counter-revolution during the second half of the 1980s. Mikhail Gorbachev, the tragic embodiment of that global crisis, came to office in April 1985 — just four months before Babangida seized power in Nigeria. Throughout its tenure, the First Dictatorship systematically drew justifications for its neofascist programmes from the events in Eastern Europe and the imperialist interpretations of these events.

The First Dictatorship had no autonomous ideology; it relied solely on what Gorbachev did and said and what Margaret Thatcher and George Bush claimed Gorbachev did and said. The global counter-revolution was a major international factor responsible for the ideological and political sustenance of the dictatorship especially between 1988 and

The second dictatorship (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

1991. The Second Dictatorship, this new military regime, is not so fortunate, for the counter-revolution is now in political and moral decline world-wide.

The Nigerian Left must now rise. There are our political propositions on which the Left can erect its strategy and tactics:

Proposition 1 The Armed Forces High Command, including the leaders of the present military junta, agreed on the annulment of the June 1993 presidential election and the reasons for it. The annulment was neither the unilateral decision of General Babangida nor the product of a factional opposition of the "Babangida boys" to Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

Proposition 2 None of the major fractions of the power-bloc, represented politically in the NRC, the SDP and the regional forums and alliances is committed to democracy or to the popular resolution of the national question. Noises made for, or against, June 12 were various forms of struggle for guaranteed concessions, compromises and compensation — the type provided by the coup of November 17, 1993.

Proposition 3 The agitation of radicals, generally, and the ideological support provided by some elements in the human rights and pro-democracy groups played a part in the inauguration of the Second Dictatorship. These elements helped — perhaps unconsciously — to establish

the new dictatorship and provide it with the semblance of "acceptance" at the most critical moment. This was what happened in the 1975, 1983 and 1985 coup, namely, the use of radicals to renew the dictatorship of the power-bloc.

Proposition 4 Like the First Dictatorship, the Second Dictatorship is not leading the country to democracy.

The campaign for a Sovereign National Conference has so far produced one important lesson, namely, that the campaign cannot be divorced from the struggle for power. Put differently, the campaign for a Sovereign National Conference is futile, or even counter-productive, if the conference is not conceived by the popular forces waging it as a road to political power.

It is the social forces in power or in the struggle for power that can convene a Sovereign National Conference or compel the convening of one — either to consolidate and legitimise its power (in case of the former) or to attempt to come to power (in case of the latter). When a National Conference is agreed upon and organised by the two sides in combat the silent agreement is that the Conference will be a forum for a decisive trial of strength — just like an election in America or Western Europe.

A government which is a product of the existing balance of forces in the country cannot convene a Sovereign National Conference which is openly advertised

as a means of altering that balance and producing a new one. Power can neither be donated nor surrendered to a non-power-seeking pressure group. Power is won in battle and lost in battle.

The Second Dictatorship has indicated the type of "Conference" it wants and has started organising it. The main fractions of the country's power bloc have accepted the dictatorship's choice and are now struggling for representation in the conference. The National Commission set up to organise the conference is essentially a committee of the power bloc. Its members are not the best representatives of the power bloc and they are not required to be. But they have the capacity to carry out the agenda of the Second Dictatorship in that particular sphere or help ensure that nothing goes wrong while the agenda is being worked out. It also does not make any difference that one or two leftists are in the Commission. Their impact there will not be helpful to our struggle against the dictatorship.

The Conference as envisaged will therefore be a Conference of self-renewal for Nigeria's power bloc — just like the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) and the Constituent Assembly (1987 - 1989) under the First Dictatorship. The outcome if things go as designed will neither benefit the popular masses across the nation nor resolve the national question in a way beneficial to the lower classes in the internal colonies.

The power bloc has, in effect, spoken and acted clearly and unambiguously enough for the left to articulate a response.

*Concluded.