

I AM opposed to this transition because I am convinced that the path defined by it will bring us neither democracy nor social justice. It will not reverse the worsening material condition of the popular masses. But I pay attention to the programme because it is, in the meantime, shaping a dangerous destiny for our nation.

There is, in my view a patriotic obligation on all of us to ensure that the damage done by this transition to our national existence and development is reversible. This can be done by minimising the damage either through critical participation in the transition politics or through systematic and rigorous ideological criticism, or both. This column is a platform for criticism of the transition programme.

By the second transition, I mean the process which started on January 2, 1993, the date previously fixed for the inauguration of democratic rule. Since we have learnt, through experience, that this regime takes no step and sets up nobody in vain, it is first necessary to examine the institutional framework within which the transition is taking place. This is how to understand the course of the transition and determine its possible fate.

When the National Assembly was being inaugurated on December 5, the official impression given was that the Assembly would share power with the military presidency. Many people had rejected this de-facto diarchy and argued for a full restoration of civil rule on January 2, 1993. But, as it has now turned out, the National Assembly

was not meant to share power. It was intended to have no power at all. And that is exactly the situation now.

The speculation however remains, and is indeed becoming stronger, that the Assembly will be called upon at a critical moment (but before August 27, 1993) to endorse the appointment of an Interim President or the extension of General Babangida's presidency, depending on circumstances. This speculation is strengthened by the simulated power struggle between the Senate and the House of Representatives — the two chambers of the National Assembly — and the presentation of the Senate as 'confrontational' and the house as "co-operative".

The ruling by the Clerk of the National Assembly that the two chambers are equal in status is suspected to have prepared the ground for the House of Representatives — which harbours the overwhelming majority of the members of the Assembly — to be used at the critical moment if the Senate continues with its confrontation. The presentation of the Budget Speech to the House alone was a rehearsal of the anticipated strategic move.

The establishment of the National Defence and Security Council (ND-SC) in place of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) on January 2 was presented officially as a movement towards a constitutional democratic rule, that is, a step in the gradual dissolution of the military

The second transition

By Edwin Madunagu

dictatorship. The "proof" provided was that whereas there is no provision for the AFRC in 1989 Nigerian Constitution, there are provisions in that document for the National Defence Council and the National Security Council.

The weakness of this "proof" is that the NDC and NSC are prescribed, not in the abstract, but in the context of a political system and a state structure where a National Assembly exists and functions as the highest organ of state power. In the absence of such a National Assembly, the existence of the NDC and NSC merely strengthens the presidency. Hence, through the establishment of the NDC and NSC the nation was gripped more firmly by the military dictatorship. In effect what happened on January 2 was the strengthening of the ruling military junta and its presidency. The transition is therefore reversible.

The 27-member Transitional Council sworn-in on January 2 performs two functions simultaneously. First, it creates the illusion that there is now a responsible civilian administration at the federal level — an interim government for which many Nigerians had clamoured before the termination of the first transition on November 17, 1992. Secondly, the Transitional Council, although not autonomous, shields the military regime from blame, especially in the area of economic man-

agement. There is a widespread speculation that the Council has a third function which will be assumed on August 27, namely, that of supporting the National Assembly to endorse an Interim President or to extend the tenure of the military presidency.

The "IBB-must-stay" campaign being prosecuted by the *Association for Better Nigeria* also comes in as a factor that may determine the fate of the second transition. And in determining the weight of this factor it is sufficient to focus attention on objective processes. Every speculation, prediction or projection should be based on these processes, their antecedents and the character of the regime. Superstition and abuse are not necessary.

The danger of the current campaign for the extension of the military presidency lies, not in itself, but in the context in which it is being pursued. Ordinarily every group of citizens should have the right to campaign for any type of administration. But this particular campaign is being waged in a period of deep national disaffection and alienation, severe economic crisis and increasing material hardship for the masses of our people.

The real fear is that (since the economic situation will not improve tomorrow) if the campaign continues, the solution prescribed in it, namely, that the military presidency should extend its stay, may appear either as a viable or rational solution or as the

only patriotic solution in the circumstances of a national crisis.

We should therefore be opposed to the campaign for the simple reason that we do not want the solution advocated by it to appear as an option at all. And in opposing it we should not invite the regime to suppress it by force or legal action. This will give the impression that the freedom for which we clamour is a partial or conditional one.

Here then are the elements of the institutional framework under which the second transition (January 2, 1993 - August 27, 1993) is being executed: A castrated National Assembly suspected of being prepared to abort the transition in order "to save the nation"; a National Defence and Security Council adjudged to have strengthened the military dictatorship instead of loosening it; a Transitional Council that changes nothing and promises nothing except illusion; a deep social and economic crisis; and an apparently well-funded campaign for the extension of the military presidency.

Projections and predictions on the fate of the transition should be worked out from the motion and the dialectical relationships of these elements and the forces opposing them. But as we do this we should never lose sight of what should be our minimum strategic objective namely, to see off military rule this year and simultaneously compel whatever regime may succeed it to accept that it is, at best, an interim administration.