

IN the last few weeks, the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the National President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the President of the Senate have, on different occasions, vowed to defend the unity and the federal structure of the Republic of Nigeria. For them as for the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, "the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable". At least one of these three personages has pledged to defend the corporate existence of Nigeria, in its present form, with "the last drop" of his blood.

The vow of our compatriots, coming after a similar one by Nigeria's military hierarchy, was in apparent response to the demand by the newly-formed Movement for National Reformation (MNR) and other organisations and individuals for a review of the relationships between the ethnic nationalities that constitute the Nigerian nation-state, and the democratisation of the polity to be constructed on the new union.

These three men, namely, Paschal Bafyau, Sani Zorro and Iyorchia Ayu are *leftists*, that is, partisans of the working people and the masses. And going by the constitution and history of ideologies as well as our political history, they are also expected to be patriots, nationalists, revolutionary democrats and fighters for human freedom.

But their vow to defend the Nigerian nation-state as presently constituted was not a call to a patriotic struggle, the type that militant nationalists made in 1948. Rather, it was an eminent indication of the ter-

rible transformation which the Nigerian state, the civil society, the radical movement and the leaderships of mass organisations had gone through since 1985, and particularly since 1989. Since I am known to share the same general political platform with these leftist public figures, I have chosen to start my analysis of *State and Civil Society under Babangida* from their vow.

It will be uncharitable to charge, at this stage, that the leftists whom I have cited are in the service of the military dictatorship and whatever its agenda for Nigeria may be, I will rather allow my analysis to lead up to this conclusion if that is indeed the case. What can be said, even now, is that their recent utterances are capable of diverting the struggle to institute genuine democracy in Nigeria. They may also appear as *blackmail*, intended or not.

Leftists have been known, historically, by their single-minded and unconditional commitment to the defence and promotion of social justice, the well-being of the masses and the struggle for popular power on which the realisation of social justice and people's well-being ultimately depend. In this struggle, leftists have been known to give their lives. They still do, and will continue to do so. But leftists do not sacrifice their lives for an unjust or ambiguous cause, like the defence of the present federal structure in Nigeria.

If leftists vow to fight, or actually fight, to defend the unity or structure

The tasks before the nation (1)

By Edwin Madunagu

of a nation-state, it should be because they believe that within it social justice, peoples' power and people's well-being will be more effectively defended and promoted. But this belief is not a passive or idle one. It is tied up with active struggle to realise these objectives. Leftists do not defend the unity or structure of a nation-state as an end in itself.

Besides, leftists distinguish between *content* and *form*, between *essence* and *appearance*. There are several forms of unity. In particular, there are several forms of Nigerian unity. The existing federal structure in Nigeria is one possible form of Nigerian unity. There are other possible forms. It is, to say the least, a betrayal of the leftist platform to vow to defend the present federal structure without simultaneously showing that this structure offers the best framework to continue the struggle for social justice and popular democracy in Nigeria. Many people have in fact proved the opposite.

Those who call for a restructuring of the Nigerian Federation have presented their case before the nation, and in a serious manner. Our responses should therefore not be frivolous, unless we are merely defending the status-quo. Even if we are defending the status-quo, we must do so with some seriousness, at least to earn some respect from our patrons or sponsors. It is not enough to wear the label of a leftist or a radical to attain the truth or be able to offer a superior proposition.

We recall that Ludwig Feuerbach, an acclaimed radical, could not demolish the propositions of Friedrich Hegel, a consummate conservative. If those who stand on the platform of the masses are to influence the course of our history, at this point, they must be committed and, beyond that, they must be serious in defining the tasks ahead.

In prescribing the way forward for our country, we have to proceed from the historical facts and a true interpretation of these facts. We are not permitted to work backwards, from our present predispositions and interests, thereby playing on history the type of trick that used to play on mathematics (called "working to the answer"). No. We must proceed from the beginning and trace the trajectory of our existence as a nation-state to the present. If the historical facts do not support our present prescriptions, then we have to re-examine the prescriptions and our interpretations. But then we have to re-examine the prescription and our interpretation. We are not permitted to tamper with the facts or their sequence.

The British invaders did not come to this part of Africa with a map of Nigeria. No. They came here to conquer the various communities and incorporate them into the British Empire. When the invaders forced one-sided treaties on these communities, they did not say that they would all be merged to form Nigeria. No. The British forced the treaties of "protection" on the communities *individual-*

ly. It was when the colonialists wanted to consolidate their territorial gains against the claims of other colonialists that they unilaterally constituted Nigeria, in 1914, out of the various conquered communities. The unequal division of Nigeria into the North and South and later into Northern, Eastern and Western Regions was also unilateral.

If we go by the series of constitutional conferences that took place both in Nigeria and in Britain in the 1950s it can be claimed that the various peoples and groups in Nigeria later accepted the fact of one Nigeria. But for each group or community this acceptance was *conditional*. The militant nationalists wanted a unitary, but popular-democratic state. The bourgeois leaders of the dominant ethnic nationalities (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) opposed this and proposed a federation. But each ethnic faction wanted to dominate not only the minorities in its own region but also the centre. The leaderships of the minority nationalities on their part wanted and still want a *just* and democratic union *based on local self-determination*.

In effect it was the minorities who proposed the form of unity that leftists, democrats and patriots are today obliged to support. And ultimately that is the form of unity we shall have. Either that, or we follow the footsteps, not of the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia, but of Yugoslavia.

For with time political threats and blackmail will collapse; and false leftists and patriots will be discredited and will become useless to the power bloc.

● To be concluded next Thursday