

**T**HE following notes were inspired by a charge made recently by one of Chief Olu Falae's compatriots, namely, that Falae is not a democrat, but rather a "military apologist". I found the comment offensive because it is untrue. It is an embarrassing act of reductionism to construe support for General Ibrahim Babangida's alleged presidential ambition as support for militarism or military rule; or worst still to construe it as opposition to "Yoruba interest". As a Nigerian politician, Chief Falae, like his accuser, can be criticised on many grounds. But the charge of his accuser is scandalously untrue. I have however, decided to sidetrack the charge and do an overview on the Akure-born technocrat and politician — drawing on my encounters with him.

I enjoy reading Chief Olu Falae: for his accessibility and lucidity and for his progressive, though bourgeois or capitalist-oriented ideas. The former attribute enhances the latter, for an idea can be progressive, but unnecessarily tedious. I first encountered Falae in January 1986 in an official letter he wrote to me in January 1986 communicating my appointment into the Political Bureau. He was then Secretary to the Federal Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida. The letter was short and clear — allowing me to either accept or reject the nomination. I accepted. And when, later, he wrote a second letter to me, through my employers, The Guardian-Press Limited, setting out the conditions of my membership of the Bureau, I remarked on the man's clarity.

On account of its clarity and unequivocation, this second letter was to be of immense assistance to me in one of my numerous battles with some of my colleagues in the Bureau. When, in the course of our assignment, I accompanied one of my colleagues to pay Chief Falae a private visit, I confirmed these attributes, and came upon another one: the man's modesty. I cited him, among others, when

I asked the question: Why was General Babangida able to attract to himself, many brilliant and progressive public figures in Nigeria? History will answer that question conclusively — although Falae, among others, has given some insights in his articles, press statements and interviews.

My next encounter with Chief Olu Falae was at a seminar on the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) held at the University of Lagos in the late 1980s. His brilliance, conviction and lucidity, and above all, his humility, moderated my combativeness. He was a "SAP-man": he admitted this. But then he went on to say that he would still have been a SAP-man even if he was not in government. He had, by then, moved from the Presidency (as Secretary) to become the Minister of Finance. My subject was out of office when I encountered him again. The ban on open political activities had been lifted and Falae was contemplating vying for the presidency. On this occasion, I accompanied one of my friends on a visit to discuss the question. I was always accompanying people, you may say. Well, you are right; but no comments. Here, again, he confirmed the attributes I had associated with him. The meeting was fruitful, politically; but this is not relevant here.

Then came the June 12 debacle, and I encountered Chief Falae again. It was at a meeting of activists and progressive politicians called in Lagos to discuss the crisis. I did not accompany anyone to that meeting: I was invited, though not directly, but through a "third party". I went to the meeting with the "third party". Chief Falae was angry, very angry, at the annulment of Moshood Abiola's victory. But he was calm. His position was that the annulment should be opposed, not just by the politicians, but also by the masses. I was encouraged by his views to offer my own specific sugges-

# The thoughts of Olu Falae

By Edwin Madunagu

tion. And this was supported by the "third party". My position was that we should mobilise the masses, perhaps two million-strong, form a ring around Abiola's Ikeja residence, and there declare him president. Let General Babangida roll his tanks over our heads. Few participants, in my reckoning, received my suggestion warmly. One of them was Olu Falae. The meeting adjourned soon after this proposal. I cannot now say if the caucus was ever reconvened but I followed Chief Falae's consistent opposition to the annulment, and his consequent tribulations under General Sani Abacha. I have followed his politics to date. But I have not met him or had contact with him since that June 12 meeting.

*The Guardian on Sunday*, August 29, 2004, carried in its magazine section, an extensive (four page) interview with Chief Olu Falae. The magazine was titled "This Government is Deaf". The editors presented the interview in several sections with direct and reconstructed quotes from Falae serving as captions: "We cannot survive without restructuring"; "These reforms lack human face"; "It was wrong to hold another AD convention in Lagos"; "We can pay our debts in three months"; "This government does not listen to anybody"; and "Why I may support Babangida". The sections were further divided into sub-sections, each dealing with a particular idea. I recorded 23 sub-sections and, therefore, 23 ideas. I present only one of them (restructuring) — with my own comments — while referring and recommending all of them to the readers for critical evaluation. The interview is an appropriate introduction to, or summary of, what I may call "The thoughts of Olu Falae".

Geopolitical restructuring is a recurrent subject in Falae's interviews. He utilises

every opportunity to restate his convictions, clarify his earlier positions, respond to objections, and advance his general ideas on the question. He believes that the geopolitical restructuring of Nigeria — to make it a "true" federation — is imperative, and, in any case, inevitable; so is the convening of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) as a road to it. Falae tries to avoid the use of abusive or strong language even when he is responding to abuses. In the particular interview under review, he said: "I don't know what you can do in the Niger Delta so that there will be tranquility; I don't know what you would do in the minority areas to make them feel they are having a fair handshake, if you do not restructure the polity".

It was a maximum statement, but rendered simply. Perhaps because Falae is a Christian, this statement reminded me of one of my favourite passages in the Holy Bible: I Corinthians, Chapter 13. Here, through the medium of a letter, Apostle Paul told the new Christian converts of Corinth that whatever they might do in their missionary work, whatever they might do to, or for the people, if they had no love, they would achieve nothing, and would themselves be nothing. You don't need to be a Christian to appreciate the profundity of that simple statement and Chief Falae's (perhaps unconscious) adaptation of its language. Here I agree with him completely.

But Olu Falae went on: "Lord Lugard, who amalgamated the country, did not consult you and me before he did so and he never pretended that he did a perfect job. Why should it be beyond us to sit around a table and re-arrange matters, such that whoever is in Nigeria would feel happy to be a Nigerian?" Here, I have a problem. My comment is that as some Nigerians have maintained, Lord Lugard did not set out to build a nation. He created a colony and called it Nigeria. It was the nationalists in that colony who initiated the struggle to

create a nation out of what Lugard put together. The perfidy of Nigeria's modern power-blocs and internal colonisers notwithstanding, the process has been going on for almost a century. We are definitely not going back to where Lugard found us. This is practically impossible. Even if it is possible, the move would be strongly opposed by specifically Nigerian social forces that have been produced and reproduced — fortunately or unfortunately — in this century-long process.

My position on the question of geopolitical restructuring of Nigeria can be reformulated as follows: The present political structure can no longer sustain a meaningful, much less popular, or progressive, social development. It can no longer sustain national unity. Put differently, the present political structure has become "fetters" upon economic and social development, national unity and radical reduction — if not elimination — of exploitation and domination in Nigeria. The structure, therefore, has to give way and be replaced by a new structure within which development, democratisation, and the struggle for national unity can continue. This is a pillar of a scientific conception of history, which Karl Marx gave a general formulation in 1859.

Marx postulated that the development of the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production — up to the point of the latter becoming "fetters" upon the development of the former — is a signal of the objective need of a revolution. I wish to underline this point: Even if a left-wing revolutionary government comes to power or office in the country today, one of its immediate acts will be the announcement of a process leading to geopolitical restructuring and what has been called "true federalism". No progress can be made in any direction unless and until this question is radically addressed. You cannot, under the guise of revolutionism suppress or deflect a democratic question which history has definitively thrown up.