

The universe of democracy

By Edwin Madunagu

I recall, once again, to the fresh voice which Chief Anthony Enahoro brought home with him to the present political debate in Nigeria. Before the veteran nationalist's return, the debate was becoming a dialogue of the deaf, as I had lamented. Enahoro's return helped to rescue it from that frustrating state. For a re-statement and summary of Enahoro's views on what we may now call the question of *democracy and political restructuring in Nigeria*, I refer the reader to his interview with *The Guardian* newspaper just before he left the United States of America for home, (*The Guardian*, April 11, 2000). The same issue of the newspaper carried the reports of his arrival in Lagos the previous day. Reading through the interview and the reports is like surveying the *universe of democracy*.

We start with samples of Enahoro's freshness. We have a general idea of the old fighter's proposition on political restructuring along ethnic or nationality lines. First, asked by the interviewer whether his proposition on this broad theme does not amount to a support for confederation, Enahoro replied by means of general advice: leave *names* (of structures) alone and concentrate on *content*; when an agreement has been reached, political scientists can then find a name for the structure agreed upon. Secondly, the chief elaborated on the idea of *equitocracy*. This is not a new idea. It is central to leftist conception of democracy. Enahoro only revived it and gave it a new name and concrete illustrations. In particular, he demonstrated how relevant it is in his perception of the Nigerian situation. Equitocracy, in the limited sense in which Enahoro used the term, is a statement that electoral democracy is not simply a question of "one-citizen-one vote," that is, the political equality of

all citizens. He says that in a multinational polity such as Nigeria there are spheres of national relationships where the basic human unit or aggregate is not the individual but the nationality; that is, where all nationalities are equal, have equal rights and powers and are treated equally — whether their sizes and levels of development. I agree completely, but would add that the concept ought to be extended to other spheres so that we have, for instance, gender equitocracy, class equitocracy, religious equitocracy, generational equitocracy, etc.

Thirdly, Enahoro re-stated the simple and elementary democratic principle — but a principle which Nigeria's political class is yet to imbibe — that it is not the business of government to form, register or limit the number of political parties. He wondered how the politicians in Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition programme, including many of his political associates, could have accepted the party registration condition. Fourthly, he simplified the question before a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) to that of deciding what the nationalities can do separately and what they can, and should, do together. Providing an insight he said, for example, that it is not the business of some government institution at Abuja or some other remote administrative centre to decide who should be the traditional ruler of Uromi. Enahoro called on the Nigerian nationalities, political groups and individuals to commence a debate on the content of political restructuring and the sovereign national conference where the issue will be discussed. He mindily rebuked those advocates of a sovereign conference who are waiting on the government to or-

ganise such a gathering for them.

Lastly, Chief Enahoro reminded, or rather advised Nigerians that the country has not arrived at democracy. But I see this as an understatement. My opinion, which I believe reflects the fact, is that Nigeria is not just a democracy; the present class of professional politicians and political leaders is not democratic in beliefs and attitudes and is not becoming democratic. To put the matter differently, the country's democratic culture is still very low and the institutional foundations for democracy have not been laid. If I am challenged to make a substantiation, I would cite, first, the content and form of the various disagreements, since the return to civil rule, between the Presidency and the National Assembly; between the chief executives and the legislatures at the state level; and between the chairpersons and councillors at local government level. The issue is not that these disagreements arose but that the way they were prosecuted was thoroughly undemocratic and backward. I would also cite the prosecution of the Senator Waku affair; the *Sharia* civil war; and Senator Arthur Nzeribe impeachment comedy. Whenever a disagreement appears our "democratic" politicians and rulers throw overboard the few "democratic" pretences they carry about and openly embrace political barbarity and fascism. So, a Nigerian politician is democratic when everything is alright and in his or her favour. The destruction of the town of Odi in Bayelsa State, the continuation of colonialist policy towards the Ogoni people, the different attitudes towards the various political blocs, the invasion of media houses and

harassment of media practitioners, etc, are all indicators of the level of Nigeria's political culture.

Nigeria's "political class," that is, the group of professional politicians and political office-holders, are incapable of surveying the universe of democracy, or going into concrete details when speaking about democracy, "true federalism," resource control, principle of derivation, restructuring and sovereign national conference, etc, because they are not democrats in any deep sense and do not believe in democracy as a mode of social development. Enahoro is challenging his political associates to debate the universe of democracy, that is, to debate concretely what they mean by *democracy, secularism, federalism, true federalism, fiscal federalism, confederalism, union of federations, federation of federations, confederation of federations, etc*. I shall confine myself here to general, but provisional, propositions.

In considering "forms of political association," as our politicians now put it, it is more practical to start with federalism and see how concretely unitarism on the one hand and confederation on the other hand, deviate from it. In this regard it will be helpful to recall K.C. Wheare's principle of federalism: "What is necessary for the federal principle is not merely that the Federal Government, like the state government, should operate directly upon the people, but further that each level of government should be limited to its own sphere and, within that sphere, should be independent of the other level.

From this general principle emerges three strategic differences between federalism on the one hand and unitarism and confederalism, on the other. In the first place, a federal government acts on the people directly; but a confederal govern-

ment acts on the people indirectly through state (and local) governments. In the second place, whereas in a federal set-up the federal and state governments are autonomous within their respective "spheres," there is either no such autonomy in a unitary system or the autonomy is so heavily circumscribed as to render it merely academic. In the third place, whereas a Federal Government is constituted directly by the people, through elections or otherwise, a confederal government is constituted by the states through electoral colleges or otherwise. Also important for consideration is the question of parliamentarism or presidentialism or their admixture. Finally, there is the question of collective presidency with rotational chairpersonship.

What Chief Anthony Enahoro suggests is a Union of Federations of Nigerian Ethnic Nationalities. There will be eight such federations, and an undetermined number of nationalities in each federation, except two; namely, the Yoruba federation in the South-West and the Igbo federation in the South-East, both of which will be ethnically homogeneous. In Enahoro's structure, the nationality government will be comparable to the present state government in power and functions; the principle of derivation in revenue allocation will be applied to the nationality; the functions and power of federation will be somewhere between those of the present state government and those of the present federal government. The union government will essentially be a confederal government. The nationalities will be equal in the federations, and the federations will be equal in the Union. He leaves the allocation of functions to the various levels of government to a Sovereign National Conference. Enahoro prefers a parliamentary system of government and collective presidency, but he leaves the questions open. Although I disagree fundamentally with the nationality *statehood*, I think Enahoro's framework is a very good reference for a national debate.