

# Victims and beneficiaries

By Edwin Madunagu

As the nation prepares for the Sovereign National Conference (SNC) revolutionary patriots should concentrate their efforts on articulating the problems with Nigeria and collating the solutions which have been offered to them by the various fractions of the ruling class. For every solution that has been offered our questions should be: Who are the victims?, Who are the beneficiaries? For the present conditions in the country — as harsh as they are — have beneficiaries. Not all Nigerians are victims. We should be very suspicious of the pronoun “we”.

When the beneficiaries try to lift the debate to the skies with the usual talk about “the national interest,” “national unity,” “self-reliance,” “capacity utilisation,” “accountability and discipline,” “free market,” “commercialisation and privatisation,” “deregulation,” we should bring them down to the earth with the questions: Who are the victims? Who are the beneficiaries?

Revolutionary patriots are not statesmen/women. They must refuse to be flattered and bribed with appointments and titles which, in our own context, symbolise exploitation, oppression, betrayal, bestiality, corruption, etc. As uncompromising fighters for social justice, popular democracy, empowerment of the lower classes and special groups and the amelioration of the miserable human conditions in our land revolutionary patriots cannot be statesmen and women. For the present Nigerian state is the

state of exploiters, feudal lords and oligarchs, fascist war-lords and imperialist agents — in short, the state of the beneficiaries of the present social order. It is a social order that has to be dismantled and replaced with a popular-democratic state where the victims of the present will become free men and women. Until then revolutionary patriots should remain rugged fighters.

Oppressed nationalities should not be taken in by any pontifications on the “benefits” of national unity or the disadvantages/dangers of confederation or disintegration. They should dismiss all self-serving and idiotic statements about the nation’s unity being “unnegotiable.” For the issue, really, is not what benefits can be derived from being together — this is abstract nonsense. The issue is whether particular ethnic groups and nationalities are, on the bases of their own experiences, inspired to remain Nigerians; and if not, what must be done to inspire them. In other words, the question is: Who benefits from the present state-structure, and who loses? Who will benefit from a restructuring?

On the last day of 1983, General Sani Abacha, in announcing the coup that removed President Shehu Shagari from office spoke of: “Grave economic predicament which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation,” “hopelessly mismanaged”

economy; Nigeria becoming a “debtor and beggar nation;” non-availability of food “at reasonable prices for our people;” health services being in “shambles;” hospitals becoming mere “consulting clinics;” educational system “deteriorating at alarming rate;” unemployment figures reaching embarrassing and unacceptable proportions..”

Correct description. But what solutions — other than the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), which devastated a large number of petty traders and petty commodity producers across the land, — did the new military government adopt? And what effect did they have on the people? The answers are found in the fact that 20 months later when General Abacha again made a coup announcement he repeated the allegation he had made against the Shagari regime.

On this latter occasion he announced that the nation’s economy was getting “worse and more deplorable.” He decried the “ever-increasing scarcity and soaring cost of essential commodities...” “deplorable state of our hospital,” “increasing deterioration of our health care delivery system,” the “alarming level” of unemployment among our citizens, especially the graduates, etc.

The litany was continued by General Babangida himself in his 1986 Budget Speech and then at the in-

auguration of the Political Bureau in Abuja on January 13, 1986. He spoke of mass poverty; illiteracy, disease and ignorance; political oppression and repression; economic depression, inflation and unemployment; exploitation and gross inequality; ethnicity and tribalism; corruption, dishonesty and armed robbery; misrule and anarchy; alienation and marginalisation; etc. All these were identified as problems afflicting the country.

The immediate solutions adopted by the new regime to these problems included the imposition, on workers, of savings, deducted from sources; the debate on whether, or not, the Federal Government should obtain the IMF loan to bail out the ruling class from the consequences of its rapaciousness; and the counter-trade experiment. The compulsory saving increased the material burden on the poor. The IMF loan was rejected in a public debate, but the government defrauded the nation by inaugurating precisely those economic measures which Nigerians thought they had rejected by rejecting the IMF loan. The problems identified by Babangida and Abacha remained as they were described — and then got worse. Victims remained victims.

The burden of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) — the main contribution of the Babangida regime to the material misery of our people — has been on the lower classes, especially the poor. The lower middle classes have also not been spared. These are the victims. The beneficiaries are bourgeoisie and the new groups of wealthy men and women — military and civilian — which the eco-

nomic regime has created: Speculators, smugglers, money launderers, fake bankers, “419,” oil bunkerers, state robbers, etc. The state of the Nigerian people is, today, worse than what it was ten years ago when General Abacha first addressed the nation.

The coming political battle should be one between the oppressed and exploited in Nigeria against their oppressors and exploiters, the popular masses of all nationalities against the ruling class, people of oppressed nationalities against the hegemonic blocs — in short, victims against beneficiaries. The disaffected fractions and members of the middle and upper classes should be persuaded to join the battle on the side of the “wretched of the earth.”

If the question is to be resolved by dialogue, through a Sovereign National Conference, then all issues must be placed on the table. Military usurpers, civilian collaborators, oppressors, and traitors cannot tell us what will be discussed and what will not be discussed. If a bourgeois, superficial conference is organised by the state in spite of popular opposition, then a rival conference, a popular one, should be organised to hold simultaneously in another location. This will define the next stage of the struggle.

No radical or leftist should fall into that dogmatic trap where all “national unity” movements are, *ipso facto*, considered progressive. On the contrary, we should appreciate the liberating and revolutionary potential of anti-hegemonic popular mobilisation. It is true that we dream of a world without national boundaries. But our desire for a world where there is no oppression of any type — class, national, ethnic, racial, caste, gender or religious — is more fervent. Indeed the realisation of the former will be a consequence of the materialisation of the latter.