

Opinion

Wahab Dosunmu's 'alternatives'

By Edwin Madunagu

THIS is the concluding part of my trilogy on Revolution. In the first part, I paid tribute to Leon Trotsky, the founding theoretician of *Permanent Revolution* (Leon Trotsky on revolution, Thursday, September 2, 2010). In the second, I ran a commentary on aspects of the debate on the inevitability and desirability of a "violent revolution" in Nigeria (*The Nwabueze - Danjuma debate*, Thursday, September 9, 2010). In this concluding part I wish to look at the "alternatives" to a "violent revolution" offered by Dr. Wahab Dosunmu, former Minister of Housing, in his intervention, *Alternatives to a violent revolution* (*The Guardian*, Monday, July 26, 2010).

In his opening paragraph Dosunmu presented the problem: "Eminent legal icon, Professor Ben Nwabueze, SAN, recently advocated a violent and bloody revolution as the only remedy for the ills confronting our thoroughly corrupt and abused country and peoples... My intervention in this article is to explore other alternatives to Professor Nwabueze's prescription". Dosunmu's presentation can be re-formulated as a question: How do we liberate Nigeria and its peoples from the current national burden of corruption and abuse - but doing this without employing violence, and without bloodshed? What alternatives to "violent and bloody" change exist in Nigeria?

Wahab Dosunmu suggested two broad alternatives: the establishment of *Assets verification Commission* and the convocation of *Constitutional Conference*. It is not entirely clear if the two alternatives can be combined, and executed either concurrently or consecutively, or if the two alternatives - Commission and Conference - are mutually exclusive, that is, "either...or". However, this ambiguity does not present an insurmountable problem. We may simply go round it. Fortunately, the two alternatives have the same set of fundamental premises - which we may now list and examine, before returning to the alternatives themselves.

The summary of Dosunmu's premises is that "all the known agents of peaceful

change in civilised societies are either comatose, complicit, or non-existent in Nigeria". He listed these "agents" as: the Legislature; the Judiciary; the Bar; the "new breed" politicians created by General Babangida during his (1985-1993) transition; religious leaders; traditional rulers; the "civil society"; and the press, "the fourth estate of the realm". Here is a summary of Dosunmu's verdict: "The selected (not elected) legislative houses are riddled with corrupt practices", "the judiciary is irredeemably tainted by its own rotten eggs, aided by the greedy so-called learned members of the Bar"; Babangida's newbreed politicians have largely become 419s; the religious and traditional rulers have been corrupted and co-opted by corrupt political rulers; the "civil society", by which Dosunmu meant "civil society organisations", have been hijacked by politicians; about 90 per cent of the nation's electronic and print media is owned by corrupt public officers.

Dosunmu was not deterred by the bleak picture of the Nigerian situation he himself had painted. He still went on to present his "peaceful alternatives" to "violent and bloody revolution". He equally did not see the contradiction between his thesis that "all the known agents of peaceful change in civilised societies are either comatose, complicit or non-existent in Nigeria" and his offering suggestions for a peaceful change. To be able to proceed we have to assume that Dosunmu hopes that these "agents of peaceful change" will somehow be re-awakened and given the last chance to perform their historical duty. It should be noted that Dosunmu did not absolutely rule out "violent and bloody revolution"; he only pleads that this should be "our last resort, if all other non-violent alternatives fail".

The first alternative to "violent and bloody revolution", that is, the setting up of "Assets Verification Commissions", by law, simultaneously in all the 36 states and in Abuja, is specifically premised on the fact that "all the organs of government responsible for enforcing sanctions (against corruption) are compromised because they are also corrupt". We should, therefore, employ the only remaining option, namely, "making it unat-

tractive to engage in corrupt practices". The Commissions will "compel all public office holders, since 1960, to submit, in an affidavit, details of their assets". Surviving children of those deceased should do the same on behalf of their departed parents. And "any asset that cannot be justified within the legitimate earnings of a public official, should be made to revert to the state or local government area in which the asset is situated, if fixed". Intervention, via sworn affidavits, can be made by members of the public, and objections can be lodged with the Appeals Courts for adjudications.

We immediately see the problems with this "alternative". Who is to set up the Assets Verification Commissions? Is it the Presidency? Perhaps, if Dosunmu's piece is read very closely. But, then, since they are to be backed by law, the legislation will have to be passed by the National Assembly. But this is same group of "selected" members neck deep in corruption. Who is to enforce the law? The existing law enforcement agencies? Who is to defend the law and publicise it? The same "civil society" and the "fourth estate of the realm" already compromised, corrupted and hijacked? Who is to play the socialisation task usually assigned, in the rural areas, to religious leaders and traditional rulers? Is it these same personages, or new ones to be created? Finally, what Appeals Courts was Dosunmu talking about? Is it the same judiciary "irredeemably tainted by its rotten eggs, aided by the greedy so-called learned members of the Bar"?

It will be unpatriotic, to say the least, to leave these questions at the level of rhetorics. Beyond that, it will be unfair to Dr. Wahab Dosunmu whose intervention, I believe, was a product of deep reflection and "righteous indignation". The answer to my rhetorical questions is that a revolution - perhaps not "violent" and not "bloody" - must precede this first "alternative", or rather, must be the first act in this "alternative".

Dosunmu's second "alternative", namely, the convocation of a Constitutional Conference "to decide, once and for all, the terms of our union, and our engagement", is a fa-

miliar one. It is premised specifically on the following equally familiar, thesis: "Nigeria is a nation of ethnic nations. The ethnic nationalities bundled together by British Colonialists were politically co-joined with their neighbours without their consent. The allure of political independence submerged the centrifugal forces that tended to make regions drift apart. Immediately after independence, the centrifugal forces resurfaced..." As for the agencies that would "trigger" the process of convening the prescribed Constitutional Conference, Dosunmu suggested: "The burden, once again, is on the incumbent office holders, the President and members of the National Assembly, who should take the necessary actions to convene a conference that is representative of all ethnic nationalities".

My comments on this second "alternative" are two. The first is exactly the comment I made on the first "alternative", namely, the need for a revolution of sorts to start off the process since the institutions identified by Dosunmu for this task are all corrupt, compromised and "rotten". My second comment is this: How will the convocation of a Constitutional Conference or even disintegration solve the problem of corruption which not only Professor Nwabueze and General Danjuma, but also Dosunmu himself, identified as Nigeria's main problem, a problem that afflicts the entire polity - from North to South, West to East?

We may leave the matter there for this is an ongoing discussion. I would, however, like to refer Wahab Dosunmu to the prescription offered by late Tai Solarin after the 1979 General Elections. In a piece titled: *The Stolen Presidency* and published in the *Sunday Tribune* of November 1979, Tai Solarin predicted that the next election would be between the NPN, party that "stole" that Presidency and a new *Revolutionary Party* "which having studied how the NPN came to power knows exactly what to do to supplant the NPN for the Presidency". This did not take place. Are the prospects better today?

• This column is proceeding on a two-week break.