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PART ONE

III. Political Parties and Ideology in Nigeria

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In the years preceding the 1979 national elections, ideology featured prominently in political debates and consultations regarding the new constitutional order. Proponents of a social democratic system were particularly prominent. However, the actual formation of political parties, governed by the new requirements for national representation, and the resurgence of veteran political leaders, returned the country to familiar configurations. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) came forward with a model of political recruitment that enjoyed more success than that of its competitors. However, it entrenched the accommodation of sectional and prebendal interests that eventually undermined the government's efficacy and legitimacy.

This article explores the processes of party formation as Nigeria began the return to civilian rule after the nine-year rule of General Yakubu Gowon was forcibly ended on July 29, 1975. It sketches ideological differences, ethnic coalitions, and the resurgence of political figures from the earlier civilian era. During 1975-1979, the country was guided on a course, decided upon by the military regime and its senior civilian advisers, that was reformist in many spheres. Since the military proconsuls held all the trumps, there was unwillingness on the part of many political actors, and their supporters, to play their hand too openly.

Instead of succumbing to the urge to impose coherence on this state of affairs, caution is needed when discussing the complex political dynamics of this era. Shortly after his arrival in power, General Murtala Muhammed issued a decision that suggested a significant ideological shift in Africa. He rejected the position taken by United States President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger regarding the independence struggle in Angola. Instead, General Muhammed threw the decisive support of his government behind the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola). As any tracing of Nigeria's involvement in intra-African disputes would reveal - whether the Shaba episode in Zaire (March-May 1977), the Ethiopian-Somalian war (July 1977-March 1978), the Chad civil war (November 1965-April 1979) and the Tanzanian-Ugandan conflict (October 1978-April 1979) - the military regime posture has remained consistent. Briefly, the consistency has been of a formal OAU nature, demanding fidelity to the principles of non-intervention in the affairs of fellow sovereign states, opposition to the involvement of foreign powers in African disputes, and the promoting of mediation.

Another example of how expectations about Nigeria contrasted with actual developments concerns the various stages of the return to civilian government. During the first stage, 1975-76, in which the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) prepared a draft constitution, it was

evident that the mixed-economy advocates had prevailed against the prominent advocates of a socialist Nigeria. Two of these advocates in the CDC (49 members plus the Chairman), historians Yusufu Bala Usman and Segun Osoba, produced a minority draft. During the second stage of this transitional program involving a wide-ranging debate on the draft constitution, the socialists appeared to get the better of their opponents. The 1977 elections to the Constituent Assembly, however, produced a body even more conservative than the CDC. Still, there was some consolation for individuals who argued that these elections did not reflect the true dynamics of Nigerian society. The Assembly had been indirectly elected by local government councils and a sizeable number (27 of 230) were directly appointed by the federal government.

The Neutralizing of the Nigerian Left

After the lifting of the ban on party politics on 21 September 1978, the first group to announce its formation was the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. This was soon followed by more than fifty other political associations. Many presented themselves as “progressive” or “welfarist,” but their public existence would be fleeting: e.g., the Socialist and Working People's Party (SWPP), the Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youths (SPWFY), and the Nigerian Workers and Peasants Movement (WOPVAN). Under the Nigerian Constitution of 1979 and the Electoral Decree of 1977, such associations had to satisfy three general criteria to be registered as political parties: the creation of party offices in 13 of the 19 states of the federation; sufficient organization in the local government areas of these states to present their programs effectively to the electorate; and, finally, accordance with Chapter II of the constitution on The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy.

Only five of the nineteen parties that submitted registration papers were adjudged by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to have satisfied all three criteria: the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP), and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The factors which appeared to distinguish them were the following: access to adequate funds, leadership by a well-known political figure from the pre-military era, and a popular base of militants and allied groups. None of the socialist associations got through this gauntlet. Although several socialist thinkers gained prominence, especially on university campuses, they were never able to build a national association capable of challenging the emerging conservative or liberal-welfarist parties.

The debate within the ranks of the socialists revolved around three options: first, whether they should focus on building a long-term political movement and overlook the race for electoral advantage in the first post-military government; second, whether they should ally with the progressive/welfarist parties; and, third, whether a policy of “entrism” should be practiced and their members join the two left-of-center parties and fight to move them further to the left. Many of the socialists shifted from one to another of these strategies as the campaign progressed. The

failure to gain registration of the most active of the radical organizations still in contention, the Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth, resulted in its members being advised to join the PRP or UPN.

Despite steadfast advocacy and activism, socialism would not be a central issue in the 1979 elections. Moreover, no socialist movement or organization is effectively engaged in the struggle to succeed the military government. Such a dénouement did not seem likely between July 1975 and September 1978. Nigerian socialists played a prominent role in opposing Yakubu Gowon when his administration became increasingly riddled with corruption, and when Gowon seemed unwilling to make his long overdue exit from State House.¹ Their challenge to the draft constitution, as mentioned earlier, was articulate and effective. From October 1977, however, when the Constituent Assembly began its deliberations largely devoid of Marxists, Nigerian socialists became more the target of rather than the source of political action. Two developments, in particular, eroded their political prospects: the restructuring of the trade union movement, 1977-78, and a crisis over increased fees in the universities in March and April 1978.

The promotion of a radical political agenda in Nigeria is closely tied to the organization and dynamism of the trade union movement. As in other countries, left-wing parties rely on funds provided by such unions to compete effectively in electoral politics. In the case of Nigeria, this consideration is heightened because of the role hard cash plays in election campaigns. Without a trade union connection, socialist associations could not set up functioning offices in two-thirds of the states of the Federation. The trade union reforms introduced by the Obasanjo military government did achieve one objective many Nigerian progressives would applaud, namely, the condensing of the large number of unions into seventy industrial unions. Attitudes to the creation of one central labour organization, the Nigerian Labour Congress, differed as to whether it would facilitate the suppression or representation of workers' interests. However, the third major aspect of this decree, namely the proscription of any formal association between trade unions and political groups or of any financial contribution from the former to the latter, was a grave blow to the prospects of any left-wing, not to mention socialist, party for some time to come.

In the case of the 1978 fees crisis in the universities, the Government's actions dispelled whatever lingering trust the Nigerian Left had in the post-Gowon military regime. A substantial increase in boarding and lodging fees for university students was decreed by the Government via the Nigerian Universities Council. This decision triggered demonstrations which resulted, at the University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University, in the fatal shooting of several students by the police and army. Upon receiving the report of the Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the disturbances, the Government ordered the expulsion of several lecturers from the

¹ Yakubu Gowon is still the longest-serving Nigerian head-of-state.

Universities of Ibadan, Lagos and Calabar, and one journalist from a government-owned newspaper.

In view of the already declining role of the Left in national affairs since the brief rule of General Muhammed (July 1975- February 1976), the severe disciplinary action taken against outspoken lecturers in 1978 tempered the willingness of their colleagues to put themselves at risk by criticizing a government which had already promised to go. The final act in the muzzling of the radical Left came with the December 1978 decree banning university employees and students from participating in party political activities. It can be concluded that the Nigerian Left - including its significant representation among university lecturers and students - was consigned to the sidelines in the contest to determine the first post-military government.

The Registered Parties 1: The Center-Right

On the basis of the brief survey above, it can be seen that the struggle for socialism, as far as legal political activities are concerned, was postponed until after the 1979 elections. Its prospects will partly depend on how openly or fully an association can function before it has been registered as a political party. Any discussion of social progress via political action in Nigeria in the near future must focus on the campaign promises, class composition, organizational capacity and electoral prospects of the leftist PRP and UPN. As for the three center-right parties, the GNPP, NPP and NPN, although they can be distinguished in their sectional support, or the prominence of “heavyweight” politicians in their line-up, they differ only marginally in their ideological pronouncements.

The Great Nigerian People's Party is notable for the determination of its Chairman and presidential candidate, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, to invest his large personal fortune in the bid for national leadership. His party appears to have drawn popular support in such far northern states as Sokoto and Kaduna, and should put up a reasonable showing in many states in the eastern flank of Nigeria, from Waziri's home state of Borno south to Cross River and Rivers States. To the wider public, however, the GNPP is mainly known for its leader's slogan of “politics without bitterness.” According to Uncle Waziri (as he asks to be called), all good things in life - schools, roads, hospitals, industries, etc - will follow inexorably from the increase in camaraderie and fair-play in Nigerian politics.

The Nigerian People's Party has gone through the most tortuous development of all the parties, and this may be reflected in the voting results later this year. It is necessary to put on record certain aspects of the genesis of the NPP, since they touch on the unresolved national question in Nigeria. There were two basic inputs into what emerged as the NPP: first, a coalition of representatives of some of Nigeria's ethnic minorities before and during the Constituent Assembly; and, second, the belated attempt to rally the faithful of the old NCNC party of Dr

Nnamdi Azikiwe. Before the Assembly had convened, representatives from the Middle-Belt or lower North had constituted themselves as a Committee for Union and Solidarity (CUS). The motivating factor here was opposition to “Hausa-Fulani” domination, a battle cry that reflected the combative politics of the First Republic. Because of the predominance of the Middle-Belters in the armed forces, and a dozen years of unbroken military rule in Nigeria, many of their leading figures believed they would play a pivotal role in any new governing alliance. In the Assembly they avoided aligning with any of the major ethnic blocs. Instead, they sought collaboration with representatives of other ethnic and sectional minorities.

The tense battle in the Assembly in 1978 to remove the provision for a Federal Sharia (Islamic) Court of Appeal in the draft constitution represented the high point of this “majority of minorities” strategy. During these deliberations, a Club 14 (later Club 19) emerged, which grouped together aspirant politicians from within and outside the Assembly. Between the termination of the Assembly in June 1978 and the lifting of the ban on party politics two months later, Club 19 had concluded an alliance with a set of “Progressives,” mainly from the two Igbo states of Anambra and Imo, along with ex-NCNC politicians from Lagos and the Yoruba states. The final ploy to make the emergent party truly national took the form of its fusion with Waziri's personalist grouping, the National Union Council. This attempted marriage crumbled, however, when Waziri's new partners refused to make him Chairman and presidential candidate of their joint party, the NPP. After the split, Waziri proceeded to form the GNPP, while the NPP rump responded to the wooing of Azikiwe and NCNCers to bring the seventy-four year old politician out of retirement to lead the party.

The post-registration NPP is a curious, and unsettled, entity. At its head is Dr. Azikiwe, who seems to add a new plank to the party's program each time he mounts the rostrum. The sectional/sentimental basis of the NPP has shifted from its early 'union of minorities' position to the forging of a Middle Belt-Igbo axis in Nigerian politics. The party's slogan, “Power to the People,” seems to have been lifted from U.S. protest politics of the 1960s. There is some attempt to project the NPP as being more democratic than the other parties and more concerned with bringing power closer to the people. Its best electoral chances appear to be in the two Igbo states, and a fair showing is expected in two of the Middle Belt states, Plateau and Benue, as well as in Lagos and Rivers States. Since Azikiwe had delayed getting into the race, many prominent Igbos - including some of his former lieutenants - had settled into the NPN. The overall campaigning showed the political disunity of the Igbo elites since the civil war.

The National Party of Nigeria regards itself as Nigeria's natural party of government and with good reason. During the months immediately preceding the lifting of the ban on politics, an impressive number of politicians of the First Republic - commonly referred to as “heavyweights” or “men of timber and caliber” - came together to re-establish what is in large part the governing coalition that was dispersed by the first military coup of January 1966. Although a number of

younger politicians from the universities and public corporations had undertaken much of the legwork involved in setting up the National Movement (parent to the NPN), when the party held its first convention in Lagos in December 1978 they were quickly moved aside by the old guard who appropriated the leading positions, permitting their preferred appointees from the “Newbreed” to fill the others.

The most striking aspect of the NPN manifesto is its continuity with the past quarter-century of Nigerian government action. There are many improvements promised in the provision of amenities, especially to the rural areas, of better housing, health delivery systems and educational facilities. Yet the general tone of the party's pronouncements is one of a smooth transition from military to civilian government, keeping basically to the socio-economic policies that typify the post-colonial period:

The Party will encourage, protect and promote private initiative, ownership and control in those areas of our economy where private control and ownership do not threaten or endanger the public interest. Such a judicious mixture of private and public ownership is necessary in order to mobilize all our resources at this stage of our history . . . We do not consider it appropriate at this time to envisage programs which go beyond the aspirations of our Federal Constitution by creating unrealistic expectations among our people.

The composition of the NPN leadership is what its own adherents would call the “responsible” elements in Nigerian society, and what its opponents would dismiss as the monied ruling class. What is striking about the NPN is not its conservative political program, and crowded ranks of former politicians, prominent lawyers and businessmen (as well as its covert supporters among traditional rulers). Rather, it is the way in which the NPN, as the party seeking the most direct path to political power, has replicated within itself the fundamental structure and principles of the post-colonial Nigerian state. The architects of the NPN know just what it is that enables a social formation like Nigeria “to work,” and this basic frankness enables them to avoid - at least in the short term - the normal divisions and disputes which render Nigerian politics so prone to collapse.

Only a few of these features and practices can be discussed here as they will be analyzed more fully when a general study of the transition to civil rule is undertaken. The NPN recognizes that a basic principle of Nigerian political and economic life is the equal division of social goods, or what Nigerians often refer to as the “national cake.” This principle is not conceived in the traditional liberal sense of equality of individual opportunity. Rather, the basic social units of Nigeria are taken by the NPN leaders to be the ethnic, linguistic and regional blocs of the population. The NPN has therefore made into an operative principle of party policy what is frequently repeated in the 1979 Constitution as a directive principle in the conduct of

government affairs, i.e. that the President or Governor or whichever public official is involved “shall have regard to the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity.”

In the selection of persons to fill its three most important national posts - presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and Chairman of the Party - the NPN devised a formula, now known as zoning, by which the standard-bearer for the first election would come from the North, his running-mate from the East, and the Party Chairman from the West. Given the ethnic dynamics of Nigerian society, this has meant in practice that the well-known triangular pattern of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo predominance would be re-established. Yet the Party was able to argue that it was simply manifesting its fundamental nature as the most constitutional of Nigeria's political parties. The 1979 Constitution prescribes that “the members of the executive committee or other governing body” of any political party “must reflect the federal character of Nigeria.” Therefore, as interpreted by the NPN, the basic equalization principle of the Second Republic must be the equality of access to political power of the ruling stratum of all major ethnic groups of the population. We would consequently expect to find, and do, that below the top national positions, the Party has sought to find room for representatives of as many ethnic groups as possible.

What is clearly taking place within the NPN, and might be extended throughout the political system if the party is successful in the elections, is the legitimizing and consolidating of the basic patron-client networks of Nigerian society. The basic understanding here is that the masses of the people can be expected to vote for their sons-of-the-soil who promise to deliver the goods to their people in the way of roads, schools, water-schemes, scholarships, and public appointments. Such a calculation is not weakened by a realization that many such notabilities are likely to salt away their ten per cent of any proceeds meant for their community. This “You Chop I Chop” principle - as it is nicely put in pidgin - also serves to temper the absolute application of the notion of equal access to political power since, for electoral purposes, certain ethnic groups will be regarded as more equal than others.

The pattern of political thinking outlined above for the NPN applies in varying degrees to the other parties as well, although the NPN has been the most determined and systematic in its application. If the NPN is successful in the elections, it is likely that class and ethnicity will be integrated at a higher level (in terms of party and government behavior) than occurred during the preceding civilian and military administrations. The NPN can therefore be seen as a true conservative party in that its fundamental objective is to improve on the system of governance that was emerging under the First Republic, but which was undermined by the highly disproportionate size of the country's sub-national units. It would be ironic if, in detaching the regions or states from the boundaries of the large ethnic collectivities, the makers of the Second Republic had inadvertently rendered ethnicity a more viable basis of political organization and

management. It is from such a perspective, i.e. the rationalizing of ethnic politics and class rule, that we can understand the relatively smooth progress of the NPN since September 1978.

The Registered Parties 2: The Center-Left

The first of five elections are to be held in July 1979 and there is no certainty that Aminu Kano will obtain tax clearance to compete for the presidency on the ticket of the People's Redemption Party. Even if he is not disbarred, it is difficult to see his party winning significant national power in 1979. Although Chief Awolowo usually refrains from directly attacking Aminu Kano and the PRP, he indulges in the telling gibe that the PRP is a lame donkey which can never get its riders to the promised destination. Aminu Kano and his northern lieutenants have played a two-sided game in recent years. On the one hand, they were involved in an attempt (not supported by all his associates) to conclude an "historic compromise" between followers of the two fiercely-opposed parties of the First Republic, the traditionalist Northern People's Congress and the Northern Elements Progressive Union. Simultaneously, Aminu Kano has kept his independent political network in readiness in case the first option misfired.

On the eve of the formation of the NPN in September 1978, Aminu Kano and his supporters staged a walkout from the caucus of the National Movement in which they had participated during the preceding four months. His faction declared that it left because of insuperable ideological differences between Aminu Kano and other NPN organizers. The latter countered that the main reason for the split was Aminu Kano's failure to get any of the pre-eminent party positions he desired. After some delay, the PRP emerged in October and managed to squeak through and obtain registration. Nationally, the PRP does not have the strength of organization, the breadth of support, and the depth of finance needed to win power at the center and put its policies into effect. In many northern states, however, and particularly the largest, Kano, the PRP is the most class-based party in the elections, promoting the interests of the talakawa (peasantry) and the urban masses.

The point to note about the Emirate North is that its class divisions and prerogatives remain as glaring as ever, although many of the instruments of political and social control in its quasi-feudal structure have been altered since 1966 through a variety of reforms. These changes have been accompanied by overt class conflict since the talakawa feels less constrained by the fear of arbitrary punishment by the local courts and police, while the hegemonic classes - the traditional *sarakuna* and big businessmen - still enjoy a vast array of economic and social privileges.

Despite the relative coherence of its class identification, the PRP has projected two different ideological positions nationally. In the eyes of its opponents, as well as those of its youthful supporters, the PRP is indisputably socialist. Yet, for reasons deriving from Aminu

Kano's long years of battling outside the gates of the Establishment, and his recent attempt to win power from within it, the party has declared "democratic humanism" to be its goal. This concept has turned out to be no less nebulous than when earlier propounded by the Zambian leader, Kenneth Kaunda. Moreover, Aminu Kano has saddled his lieutenants, especially the disputatious yet eloquent S.G. Ikoku (presently, PRP vice-presidential candidate), with the task of paying homage to the leader's advocacy of "democratic humanism" while maintaining that the party's objective is a socialist Nigeria.

Despite this terminological confusion, the PRP is clearly Nigeria's most left-wing party, although it is yet to demonstrate the organizational capacity to put its radical policies into practice. The party's northern core can also be distinguished from its membership and leadership in the south, the latter often consisting of middle rank politicians who saw their chances of being nominated for electoral offices foreclosed in the other parties. From the PRP's manifesto, campaign literature and public broadcasts, the following ideological elements can be extracted. The PRP consistently speaks of the need for a new social order in Nigeria, and usually frames this concept in class terms, i.e. the removal of the traditional and comprador ruling groups and the transfer of power to representatives of the broad masses. The radical transformation of the Nigerian economy is prominently advocated. The PRP distinguishes itself from the UPN by emphasizing the expansion and socialization of the economy over the immediate provision of increased welfare benefits and social amenities.

Alone among the legalized parties, the PRP espouses opposition to imperialism and neocolonialism, and constantly criticizes the power of multinational companies in Nigeria. It is the most insistent in supporting the vigorous prosecution of the liberation struggles in southern Africa and the Middle East. The radical populism of the PRP is readily apparent among its dedicated militants seeking to mobilize the northern poor, or in its articulate spokesmen among northern university lecturers, traders and clerks. The possibility that class warfare can erupt in any of the large cities or towns of the north is not overlooked by any of the political parties, or by the military government which is prone to act firmly at the slightest sign of tension or disturbance.²

The party that provided the greatest organizational and programmatic dynamism and generated the most heated controversy in the 1979 campaign is the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). There are many factors that distinguish the UPN from the other parties. First, at seventy years of age its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, is more intellectually stimulating than almost any other political figure in contemporary Nigeria and outshines in this regard his four rivals for the presidency. The second distinguishing feature about the UPN, often acknowledged even by its opponents, is the party's superior organization. The organizational practices of the UPN

² The radical populism of the PRP suggests how such sentiments could later be reflected in radical Islamism.

percolate from the top downwards, starting from the leader who has molded himself into a highly disciplined leader, through his close political comrades of decades of political combat, and finally to the party activists at the local level. It is the UPN which has presented the most coherent body of ideas to the electorate in its four “cardinal programs”: free education at all levels; integrated rural development; free health care; and full employment.

The basic texts of the party consist of the books written by Awolowo and which, in recent years, have tended to be increasingly theoretical in nature. In the last three volumes - *The People's Republic* (1968), *Strategy and Tactics of the People's Republic* (1970), and *The Problems of Africa* (1977) - Chief Awolowo has formulated what he believes are a set of principles and practices which, if adhered to, would transform Nigeria and other African countries into democratic socialist republics. This is not the occasion to examine closely Awolowo's theoretical contributions except to state that they are an amalgam of Marxism, Fabian socialism, Christian humanism with a dose of Hegelianism, and finally the Chief's unique reflections on language, ethnicity and the federal state. It can also be noted that Awolowo's writings cover nearly all the major issues and even arguments put forward by the UPN in the current campaign.

Where the campaign manifestos and platform speeches fall short of Awolowo's published writings are in those areas in which his intentions and proposals are most clearly socialist. Some of these features that are either not reflected in the current campaign, or are deliberately played down, can be briefly mentioned. First, there is Awolowo's condemnation of capitalism and the “egoistic altruism” on which it is based. Second, there is little mention in the campaign of the procedural methods he had elaborated for ridding the nation of *rentier* classes, whether based on land or company shares. And third is his curt dismissal of the mixed-economy: “the economic hotchpotch in Britain is certainly not socialism.” Instead, what Awolowo and his party propose in 1979 can be called “socialism without class struggle.” The Chief dismisses the actual capitalists in Nigeria as being a handful of individuals. One of his co-ideologues and UPN candidate for governor in Oyo State, Bola Ige, goes a step further and contends that the so-called capitalists in Nigeria are “economic touts, commission agents and parasites.”

From the UPN's standpoint, there is no need to wage a struggle against such meager forces. On the question of how Nigeria can be transformed from its economic “hodgepodge,” the UPN is studiously vague. When pressed on this point, Awolowo often replies that he once thought Nigeria would become socialist after five years, but he no longer expects to live to see a socialist Nigeria, even if his Party wins and holds on to power after 1979. The basic refrain of Awolowo and his comrades is that the UPN has no intention of trying to introduce socialism to Nigeria in

“one swoop.”³ When confronted in private on the issue of why the UPN has been so vague on the party’s supposed socialist agenda, the usual answer of Awolowo as well as the young left-wingers in the UPN is: “You cannot conduct an electoral campaign in Nigeria in that way.” It is the questioner who is challenged to answer if the Party would get very far campaigning against the “comprador bourgeoisie.” Two assessments can be made here. The first is that the UPN's mild public pronouncements did not fully reflect the level of socialist thinking within the Party's inner councils. The second is that the pragmatic - some would say opportunistic - electoral strategy being pursued is likely to be more important in determining the Party's behavior once in power than the more considered views of its socialist thinkers.

The most appropriate description of the UPN, judging from its electoral promises, is that it is the Nigerian Welfarist, or even Free Education, Party. Here is how Awolowo justified the formulation of the UPN's four cardinal programmes of free education, integrated rural development, free health care and full employment:

In a society where illiteracy compounds the basic sociological structures, and where ideological arguments are mistrusted by the generality of the people as mere abstractions, the best way to articulate a national philosophy of development is to reduce it to programs of action.

As indicated above, the UPN has succeeded in making its program familiar to “the generality of the people,” although the level of critical debate on the proposals, and especially integrated rural development and full employment, has been low. Much more attention has been devoted, as much by the UPN as by its opponents, to the promises of free education and free textbooks at all levels.

For a party which professes to lead the way to a socialist Nigeria, it can be asked why so much importance has been placed on the establishment of a free and universal education system. The philosophical underpinning for this program of action is most elucidated in Awolowo's books. “Man,” he asserts, “is the prime mover in every economy. Without him nothing at all can be produced.” Awolowo’s argument is more humanistic than materialist: “the resources of nature are negative and inert; man, on the other hand, is positive and dynamic. He is the determinant of all the impulses of progress.” He then affirms the need to develop all persons in society so that each will be afforded “equal opportunity to contribute to socio-economic development.” The full development and employment of each, therefore, are prerequisites for the development of all. In the hands of Awolowo, Karl Marx is transmuted into John Stuart Mill. Based on his view of men

³ The Chief often cited the example of Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran who nationalized the petroleum industry in his country without adequate preparation and sufficient skilled manpower. In Awolowo’s telling, the Iranian leader had to hand back control to the oil companies and die a disgraced man in prison.

and women as the prime agents of production, he argues that the development of individual capacities is key to the development of the whole society.

On a different level, the UPN leaders and its ardent supporters believe there is a logical connection between the four cardinal programs, and particularly between free education and the ultimate objective of a socialist Nigeria. Here is a sampling of such opinions:

Bola Ige: You cannot have free education, free medical scheme, integrated rural development and full employment without moving inexorably towards socialism. Those things never happen in a capitalist society.

Labanji Bolaji: Free education at all levels is feasible in Nigeria only if the country is ready to do it ideologically by adopting true socialism.

Awolowo: . . . our determination is to build an irreversible basis for a socialist society by implementing these four cardinal programs.

The argument that the most practical way to achieve a socialist Nigeria is by committing the nation, by means of the ballot, to programs which are believed to imply, or presuppose, or necessitate the socialization of the means of production is an unusual one. It should also be noticed how socialism for the UPN in 1978-79 is conceived as judicious social engineering by a progressive government, rather than the outcome of enhanced proletarian consciousness and class action.

Socialism and the National Question

We can expect to see a cyclical pattern in the rise and fall of ideology as a salient feature of Nigerian politics. Nigeria, as commentators often argue, is still to a large extent “a geographical expression.”⁴ There are three major ways in which African governments have dealt with this challenge since independence. The first is through the agency of the single-party with real power exercised by an autocrat via the bureaucracy, secret service and police. Although legislative institutions may exist in such polities, they are usually impotent. The second is where the military imposes itself as the legitimate political authority in the nation, and the alteration in rulers then derives from intra-military politics, or the dynamics of the wider society as they filter through the military establishment. The third pattern is the recent one represented by self-proclaimed Marxist regimes that emerged from liberation struggles in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique.

None of these models has been of persistent relevance to Nigeria, and there appears little likelihood that they will be in the foreseeable future. What the political activities in 1978-79

⁴ Expression used by Awolowo in his 1947 book, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*.

represent above all is that the Nigerian national question has been thrown back for resolution into the cauldron of the country's class, ethnic and regional conflicts. If the NPN prevails in the 1979 elections, the national issue will be rendered less acute in the short term because of the party's willingness to continue the modus operandi of the system bequeathed by the military [of balancing sectional interests and the sharing of spoils]. Since, however, Awolowo's party is likely to sweep much of Yorubaland, whatever its performance elsewhere, the ideological differences between UPN policies in the West and those of an NPN-led national government will rekindle the sectional confrontations of the First Republic. This time, however, instead of a bitterly-divided West confronting an alliance between North and East, it will be a more hegemonic party in the western states up against a less cohesive and powerful alliance in the center.⁵

The PRP, NPP and GNPP have little prospect of winning national power in 1979 unless a last-minute alliance is concluded between any two of them. This leaves the UPN as the only viable alternative to an NPN government. If Awolowo and his organized and dynamic band come to power, his initial policies would bring about progressive changes in many areas of Nigerian life. An Awolowo government, for example, is likely to be the most resolute in tackling the colossal waste, inefficiency and gross corruption of oil-boom Nigeria. However, under such a government the many contradictions of the Nigerian nation, as well as those within the UPN itself, will quickly rise to the surface. An NPN government would continue the policy of the Obasanjo regime of nudging the Nigerian capitalist class away from its extreme consumerist mentality; but it will also endeavor, like its predecessor, to keep rural and urban socio-economic demands in check.

Whoever wins power in 1979, there could be a renaissance of ideological formulation and debate as occurred during the 1976-78 period. The buoyancy of the Nigerian treasury has meant that the 'common man', whether rural or urbanized, still believes that his real hope for advancement lies in the success of his relative, or other son of the soil, in getting a lien on the public purse and trickling a few coins down to him. Some progress should be made by the two center-left parties in challenging the ruling idea that the affluent have a right to enrich themselves further in return for "political service." A continuation of the current "drone capitalist" strategy in Nigeria will petrify the nation-state into a confederation of ethnic and clan dominions. The instability and volatility of such an arrangement are evident. What the progressive thinkers can offer, whether outside the party system or within the center-left parties, are not just pertinent proposals for transforming the narrow economic base of Nigeria, but also

⁵ This fundamental configuration is altered in the post-2015 government. The UPN successor political grouping, led by former Lagos State governor, Bola Tinubu, dominates the Western states and is a junior partner in the Buhari-led federal governing alliance, the All Progressives Congress (APC).

an ideological perspective from which to challenge the vertical clientelistic networks which continue the highly unequal distribution of wealth and services in the country.

Bibliographic note:

This essay is based on numerous interviews conducted in Nigeria since January 1978, and on close coverage of the daily press and other private and government publications since 1976. This work has been supplemented since September 1978 by personal attendance at party meetings and rallies throughout the country.

The term "First Republic" has entered the political lexicon in Nigeria to refer to the post-colonial civilian administrations, although the country only became a republic in October 1963. It has been used in this essay because of its convenience. Nigerians are daily creating their own political vocabulary and where appropriate I have used it. Labanji Bolaji, cited in the text, was Managing Director between 1975 and 1978 of the African Newspapers of Nigeria Ltd, which produces the pro-UPN organ, the Nigerian Tribune.