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PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRACY IN NEW AFRICAN STATES

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There is no consensus among political scientists about the meaning of Democracy, and yet whenever and wherever the word is mentioned it appears familiar as an ideal system of government to be pursued. Almost all modern political systems claim to practise one form of democracy or the other. Most of the Eastern European States, including USSR, claim to practise the "real" democracy, based on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' while their Western European counterparts, including U.S.A. claim to be practising 'liberal democracy'. All the new African states claim equally to have regimes based on democracy.

For the purpose of this paper we have adopted the definition of democracy as advanced by Austin Ranney in his book: "The Governing of Men". He defined democracy as "a form of government organized in accordance with the principle of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation and majority rule".2

In order to identify the problems limiting the practice of democracy in the new African states it is necessary to examine briefly what is involved in each of its four basic principles.

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

The principle of popular sovereignty means that the supreme power of the state must be invested in the entire community. This does not mean that the day to day decisions of the government should be based on the consent of every member of the community. The people in a democracy delegate their power of rulership to the government of the day which is accountable to them.3

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The delegation can only be best done by people who are well socialized; that is people who are well informed with the right belief system and the right type of nationalism. Such a people are conscious of the immense responsibility of the principle of delegation and hence remain watch dogs of the government performances.

**POLITICAL EQUALITY**

This principle means that all the people who are of voting age should have equal opportunity to participate fully in the decision-making process of the government. If democracy is the government of the people, by the people, it means that every individual ought to be allowed to share in the political power and participation. Merriam in *POLITICAL POWER* insisted that "popular participation by the bulk of the community is the essential part of the idea of democracy. He observed that one of the prime aptitudes of a leader is the ability to sense what the public wants".4

The principle of political equality means one man one vote. Each member of the community must be able to vote and his vote counted and given equal weight with every vote cast.5

Even though there are substantial variations in the latent endowment of the members of the community, there must however be equal political opportunities for all the members of the community. This includes opportunity to exercise the franchise, to run for and hold offices.6

**PRINCIPLE OF POPULAR CONSULTATION**

One of the cardinal assumptions of a democratic government is that of popular consultation. There must be periodic elections and these elections must be free. As Benjamin Disraeli once said "All power is a trust... we are accountable for its exercise; from the people all spring and all must exist".7

The ruled should have the opportunity of making real
choice of alternative political parties, people and policies. The machinery through which elections are conducted must not be manipulated to favour any group of persons or political parties. This periodic accountability by the rulers to the ruled makes government responsive to the needs and wishes of the people. The fact also that through election a party in power which has ceased to enjoy the confidence of the majority of the electorates ceases to govern. As S.G. Ikoku aptly observed "that popular enthusiasm in the long run is generated and sustained only by a popular government. The important thing is that government continues in office only in obedience to the expressed will of the people. The best way of expressing this will is elections. It serves no useful purpose to falsify the ballot. For we only create a veneer of democratic endorsement. But such a veneer merely provokes the people into violent demands for change".

The power to elect and sack a government is ultimately vested in the people. "The government must rest on the consent of the governed and its policies must be responsive to their desires".

On the other hand democracy ceases to exist in a situation where political influence has been installed by a group of people in the society or elections so rigged that the emerging regime could no longer be considered either popularly responsive, accountable, or open to the entry of new political competitors or aspirants.

PRINCIPLE OF MAJORITY RULE

In a democracy there is always an alternative to any political issue. It is always difficult to have a common consensus in all issues requiring governmental action. The problem here in applying the principle of majority rule is to reconcile it with that of popular sovereignty. The principle of majority rule requires that the governmental decision should be based on the desire of the majority. On the other hand the majority must respect the views of the minority. Pennock and Smith clearly emphasized this point by stating that 'Majorities must have respect for strongly
held views of minorities and must hesitate to act on a close vote on matters of great importance.\textsuperscript{11}

Other principles of democracy include the rule of law, constitutionalism, justice and equal respect of all individuals.\textsuperscript{12} Without having a government based on the concept of rule of law whose aim is directed towards ultimate benefit of all the members of the community, those with dissenting views inclusive, democracy could easily degenerate into "a mockery of its pretensions.\textsuperscript{13}"

**PROBLEM OF LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW STATES**

Most of the political elites who assumed office at the termination of the colonial rule in the New African States were mainly leaders of the various national freedom movements who fought and won independence for their respective states. Before independence it was easier for these freedom fighters to mobilize opinion and efforts of their people against Colonial Rule. The objective of these nationalist movements was aptly postulated by Ken Post as "a reaction against foreign rule, seeking above all to restore the dignity of the people who felt themselves degraded by centuries of exploitation and control.\textsuperscript{14}"

As Independence became a fait accompli these movements lost their appeals which rested on ethnic and racial base. The New States were faced with the post-Independence problems which included, political modernization, integration, education and industrialization. The nationalists who became heads of governments in the New States were in the main not well equipped to solve these problems and increasingly showed themselves hostile to the new aspirants to political life. Hence the new rulers tended to be authoritarian and utilized their privileged governmental positions to institutionalize their hegemonies and ossified the channels of political recruitment. The nationalist movement ceased to be a unifying force. Personal rivalries, ethnic ideological conflicts, became the order of the day. There was also rivalry between the new elites and traditional elites who were alarmed by the increased concentration of power in the hands of the new elites. The new rulers gradually became very authoritarian and endeavoured to impose unity from above. The promulgation of the Preventive Detention Acts in most of these countries was a weapon
to silence dissent and criticisms. This was true of Ghana in July 1958,15 in Dahomey in February 1961 and Algeria in 1962, Nigeria in 1962, in Uganda in 1966; also in Kenya in 1969. In all these places the leaders of the government used the governmental authority to ban rival parties and imprisoned their leaders. Because of the struggle for leadership "brothers are set against brothers, communities, which had lived in peace and friendship with each other during colonial rule have suddenly become hostile camps".16 In the attempt to stabilize leadership of the new states of Africa the leaders had entrenched themselves in positions of power with all the government machinery at their disposal. Opposition parties had either been banned or rendered most ineffective. People holding "disagreeable" views had either been sent to prison or made to share the views of those in power. Others are languishing in exile. The freedom of the press has fizzled out in most of the countries. As a result most of the leaders who had held ministerial appointments since late 1950's had survived many changes of government. In the face of the suffering masses, most of the leaders had utilized their positions to acquire wealth which in turn helped them to acquire "indefinite" tenure of office.

The resultant effect of the entrenched leadership is the inability of the electorates to change their governments through constitutional electoral process. As the leadership becomes irresponsive to the articulated demands of the various interest groups in the society, the stage is set for social unrest and underground movements for change of leadership. When the various interest groups: Institutional, Associational and non-Associational, cannot effectively share the power and participate in the political life of the new states there will be an increase in the areas of social tension.17 For any political system to enjoy stable leadership, there must be a high degree of consensus among the potential aspirants and participants of the political life of the system.

Hence the problem of democratic leadership is one of the aching problems of democracy in the new states of Africa. There is every need to adapt the new leadership in Africa to be responsive to the needs of its inhabitants. There must be a definite tenure of office for the highest offices of the state. The electoral processes should not be conditioned to
favour any particular interest group in the society. The system of political recruitment into the political life of the new states, must be such as to enable free entry of new and informed aspirants and exit of participants who had full tenure of office.

**PROBLEMS OF MODERNIZATION**

The problem of modernization is heightened in the new states because of the heterogenous nature of the ethnic groups which make up each of these states. The result of having so many traditional political cultures within a single state had made it difficult for the new states to evolve a single national political culture.

The problem of modernization posed here is how best to synthesize the best out of the multi-traditional political culture of the new states with that inherited from the metropolitan countries. The infrastructure of democracy cannot be erected on the traditional culture alone; nor on the wholesale adaptation of the constitution of the metropolitan countries. But, the modernization of the political systems of the new states must be an amalgam of the two. What has failed the new states is not the ornaments of their political systems such as electoral processes, parliament, judicial commission, etc. but the absence of this.

**IN DEFENCE OF THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM**

We support the two-party system not because it has been tried and accepted in the leading countries of the West. Nor do we, because classical theorists regard it as a pre-requisite for democracy. We do this because our study of modern democracies has shown us a long history of trial and error in evolving the system. We feel that the new states are in this evolutionary process, and as such it is too early for us to jump off the boat. To say that a decade or so of practice in the democratic process is sufficient to make the political systems of the new states democratic is, to say the least, unrelated to the empirical data. It will be an error of judgement for our leaders to abandon the exercise for an
"easier one". The one-party system which has been prescribed as an answer to political instability in the new states is based on the plausible argument of total participation by the polity. It is presented as a sure vehicle for national integration and modernization. And above all, it is claimed to be "African". There are two dimensions that constitute the acceptability of government. One is the scope of governmental power and the other is the form by which this power could be exercised.

It has been said that in a democracy, there is no effective limit to the scope of governmental power. It is clear that by the nature of the problems and responsibility facing the new states, there is no limit to the scope of governmental activities. Government in the new states is placed in the center of the modernization process. The problem then is how do we ensure that government does not become authoritarian? The one-party system as it is practised in some African countries and in East European countries is an elitist system. And by its thesis of "democratic centralism", any opinion or action contrary to that of the party is sacrilege. The coercive instruments of the state will be used to silence it. Secondly, it is assumed that the form power is to be exercised is by political participation of the generality. Perhaps the mobilization theorists of the one-party state have taken participation for granted. They argue that the system will infuse participation among the populace and this in turn will speed national integration and modernization.

Our fear is that the one-party state will degenerate into an authoritarian political system. The idea that the one-party state should be adopted by the new states in Africa because it is "African" is untrue. Neither in its nature nor in its postulates is it African. It is equally a borrowed hybrid as the two-party system. The omnipresent and benevolent one-party system will not solve the heterogenous nature of the African political culture. Rather we must endeavour in our process of political socialization to listen to the various interest groups. The system that will effectively do this is the two party system which gives each and every interest group a choice. The presence of a choice in the party system will make for political stability. The Tanzanian experiment which has tended to give the appearance of providing alternative
choice of candidates during elections does not provide a solution. Oscar Kambona who was the right-hand man of the Tanzanian President went into political exile because he held divergent political views with the party. It is also well known that Oscar Kambona had his supporters in and out of government, and they too have been silenced. In a two-party system, his views could have found legitimacy in an alternative party.

Does the presentation of more than one candidate in an election under a one-party system make for real political choice? The answer is emphatically no. By real political choice we mean not only the choice of candidates as in the Tanzanian experiment, but choice of parties, policies, ideas and manifestos. An alternative party plays an indispensable role by providing a legitimate and effective outlet for discontent that might otherwise degenerate into apathy, cynicism, or revolutionary activity.

It has been argued that in a two-party system, the opposition party often degenerates into a tribal or ethnic organization; instead of being the watchdog of the public will, with an alternative programme for administration. To guard against this, we suggest strongly that the nature and composition of political parties must be enshrined in the constitution. The new military rulers who have gained power with the slogan for reform must decree that all future political parties in the new states must be national in outlook and composition. The army before handing power to the civilians must see to the creation of a two-party system. These parties must have goals which should include full commitment by all parties to national integration, equitable distribution of national wealth, full employment, total development of the economy, general educational facilities, improvement of health and social services and above all in international politics a total commitment to the idea of upholding the dignity of man. If these are accepted as the national purpose, parties may differ on modus operandi.

One party may advocate the achievement of these goals via the Co-operative System. The other may insist on a mixture of capitalism with state intervention in the fields relevant to developmental needs.
We have avoided labels for any of these methods because strict adherence to ideological slogans leads to political instability. There must be a cross-current of ideas between parties rather than compartmentalization.

In summation, then we suggest that the two-party system which must be national in composition, structure and organization must pursue these four cardinal goals:

1. **National Integration:** We recognize that the new states are inhabited by different ethnic groups with varied patterns of behaviour, norms and attitudes. The political parties must through their philosophy, programmes and directives work towards total integration of the diverse ethnic groups. This could be achieved through political socialization. Promotion of inter-ethnic cultural activities as well as encouragement of inter-ethnic developmental enterprises will groom consensus and common interest.

2. **National Development Programme:** It should be the goal of the new states to develop to the fullest their natural resources. Partisan considerations for siting of industries should not be encouraged. There should be an equitable distribution of gross national wealth as well as national responsibilities among all the sections of the community.

3. **Social Welfare Programme:** A far-reaching social welfare programme should be pursued with vigour. Improved health services for the generality of the masses should be a national goal.

4. **Raising of the Standard of Living:** The only yard-stick for measuring steady economic growth and accruing benefits to the citizens is through better and improved standard of living.

It must be remembered that what failed the new states in their first attempt at democracy was not the rivalry of two national parties, but the multiplicity and loyalty to diverse ethnic political organizations. We are opposed to
the one-party system as well as the multi-party system. We do not have to maintain that the multi-party system leads to coalition and bickerings - an exercise the new states cannot afford. Hence, for our purpose, we advocate a two-party system.

PROBLEMS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

It has been said that Industrialization and democracy are closely related. Industrialization as Pennock and Smith observed, produces a dynamic and pluralistic society whose pluralism creates a variety of groups and organizations as well as a variety of relations and interests. By providing this variety of interests, sharp partisan alignments will be reduced in intensity resulting in a democratic consensus.20 Judging by W.W. Rostow's schema for economic growth, most of the new states are at the second or third stages of development, (pre-condition of take-off and take-off states).21 The danger is that with political instability, they may remain there. To avoid this, the pattern of economic development must rest on economic growth accompanied by social transformation, democracy and social justice. Some economists have given six concepts in which to pattern the economic development in order to speed up the rate of industrialization:

1) A more efficient utilization of existing productive capacity.

2) The modernization of the mode of production.

3) The securing of a stable political climate conducive for developmental objectives.

4) The reform of social ideas and concepts.

5) The forging of new institutions including the evolution of an appropriate administrative machinery.

6) The creation of a technical-administrative capacity for effective use of foreign aid.22
Despite these concepts, the key to economic development in the new states is capital and entrepreneurship. We see capital formation and investment as a direct function of savings. Since the scope of governmental functions cannot permit its rapid growth, we venture to suggest a short-term measure.

It is necessary to understand the scope of government activity today in order to appreciate the need for a short-term measure as we have in mind. Professor Arthur Lewis said 'as far as capital is concerned the main problem in underdeveloped countries is for governments to get hold of the sums they require to finance the public services, the public utilities, and the agencies which finance private enterprise. Governments are not only expected to finance public services and utilities - water, roads, railways, electricity, agricultural research, etc. - they have also to set up agricultural credit systems to finance small farmers; they are being driven into the mortgage business, providing finance for home ownership; and they are expected to finance development banks from which industrialists may borrow money. This large role of government in financing capital formation is not entirely due to modern socialistic trends; it is due to a greater extent to the burden of initiative which falls upon governments in under-developed countries where entrepreneurs are scarce and risks large. Everyone looks to the government to pioneer, and to mobilise finance from somewhere'.

The foregoing demonstrates vividly the need for outside capital for the industrialization of the new states. Judging from the growth of international mergers and favourable investment opportunities in the developed areas (with its reassured short-term and long-term returns due to stable social order) the new states have to invite investors on agreeable terms - agreeable to both parties, but more so to the investor. We make this suggestion knowing fully well the antipathy and consternation it will cause in 'nationalistic circles'. We make this suggestion because of our awareness of what Professor Lerner calls "the torment of desires that exceeds capacity". To avoid the crisis of rising expectation which constitutes the core of political instability, in the new states, some measure of economic activity must proceed in order to provide job opportunities and training for the masses. That they should have jobs (in this case working for foreign concerns) will
enable them meet the bare necessities of life. This augurs well for the stability of the political system.

Our fear is that the goals of our economic planning cannot be achieved without a massive infusion of foreign capital. Domestic savings alone cannot fuel the take-off stage without the injection of outside capital. How do we get this aid? Political instability, among other things, has forced investors to regard the new states as bad risks. No amount of exhortations and economic delegations will convince them unless they are assured of investment returns. We must therefore make the investment worthwhile for the investors. When we succeed in attracting new investments, we must make them ancillary to our developmental plans. We must make a conscious commitment of this otherwise our plans may grind to a halt. Public policy should therefore be concerned to a great extent with the development of basic industries with the co-operation of foreign investors.

Such fiscal measures as income tax and import duties relief, reduction of company taxes and amortization of capital assets in the formative years of new industries could help attract foreign investors.

Both domestic savings and foreign capital will unburden our governments to the benefit of all concerned. The experience of Ivory Coast in this wise is a case in point. We see this only as a half-way measure to stem off political unrest and assuage the expectation of the masses. Thus the government is given a breathing space in its effort in re-structuring society.

Nowhere are we advocating what Professor Galbraith delineates as "Popular Consumption Criterion" in economic planning because it minimizes the chances of the citizens sense of neglect.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The polarization of the world between antagonistic centres of power and two conflicting ideological camps has limited the choice of the new states towards an independent ideology. The two super powers - United States and the Soviet
Union have outstripped other states with their enormous economic and military strength, hence they are on the giving end, while the new states are on the receiving end.

When it is remembered that no foreign aid is directed as an instrument of charitable intent, but as an effective means of projecting the donor's national interest, it becomes more difficult for the Africans who receive these aids to pursue independent policies. Ranney aptly pointed out that "the donor states generally intend through aid to strengthen the economies and maintain the political support of friendly nations". The demand for political support made on the new states postulates a number of serious problems.

Firstly, there is conflict of ideological leanings. The new states are divided on which prevailing democratic practice to base their government. The Americans and the Soviets through effective propaganda "hawk" their respective brands of "democracy". As the new states generally accept aids from the two giant world powers it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to meet the ideological requirements which the acceptance of the aids entail, and yet maintain their own particular brand of democracy. Besides, there are differing public opinions in the new states on how best to achieve national modernisation and these opinions affect the national and international policies of the new states. Where these opinions conflict with that of the donor country sometimes external pressure is brought to bear on the government. These pressures include threat to withdraw loans and technical assistance and aids.

The manipulation of the international situation by the great and industrialized powers does in fact affect the internal stability in the new states. As most of the new states are mainly one crop or one product economies - Ghana depends on cocoa mainly for her foreign exchange earnings, Zambia on copper, Kenya on coffee, Senegal on groundnut - the great powers can deliberately manipulate the prices of these commodities in such a way that it will have serious consequences in the internal affairs of these countries. The continued low prices of cocoa on the international market was one of the chief causes for the economic depression in Ghana and consequent overthrow of the Nkrumah regime.
In the hurried quest of the new states to industrialize and thereby establish the necessary economic base for successful practice of democratic government they alienate the foreign investors who own most of the capital and exploit most of the natural resources.

Experience has shown that the advanced states always use every means at their disposal including force to protect their capital and other interests in the state. As Smith stated "they frequently back up their insistence by military intervention to protect the property rights of their investors."27

The industrialized states, because of fear of "hasty" nationalisation of their assets in African states, have recently not been pouring in aids to Africa as the states expected. Most of the development plans of these states had failed because much hopes were based on foreign capital.

In order to have minimal peace necessary for modernization and practice of democratic ideals, we contend that the new states must approach international politics with realism and caution. As most of them advocate adherence to the non-alignment policy, this should be pursued with greater realism and vigour, for one-sided inclination either to the East or West may alienate one of the super powers. In the past ten years only very few of the African states can really claim to have pursued positive non-alignment policy. While in pursuit of this policy, the new states should not however make a total departure from the ties with their traditional friends, especially their ex-colonial masters, which had undeniably left indelible marks in the political culture of the new states.

They must however strive to maintain a closer economic co-operation between both East and West. They should not embark on "hasty" nationalisation of foreign assets, as this will discourage new capital and new investors.

While the foreign policy of the new states should be geared to foster their respective national interest, ensuring sustained rapid economic development and social integration, it should never be directed to alienate unduly any of the great powers; as consequences of such alienation
may be very costly to the new states.

For this we suggest that the idea of nationalisation of foreign assets should be avoided. Greater reliance should be placed on individual private investment rather than on governmental aid in the private sector. Political stability and national integration should be the first priorities of the governments and not the White Elephants of Dams, Hydroelectric power, Extensive railways; etc. These are the capital consuming projects that involve them in massive foreign aid. In the end under-utilization of these projects shatters the hopes and expectations of the masses.

CONCLUSION

Berelson lists the conditions necessary if political democracy is to survive as follows: "Intensity of conflict must be limited, the rate of change restrained, social and economic stability maintained, and a pluralist social organisation and basic consensus must exist".28

Emphasis in these areas must be maintained and safeguarded in the new states. An area which we consider as constituting the core of instability in the new states is that which we call the permanent leadership or one state leader theory. Stated simply, this is the idea prevalent in the new states of the political leadership perpetuating itself by grafting infallibility and inviolability to its tenure of office. This tenure is maintained by the "Iron law of Oligarchy" which in the end exposes the society to violent change. The result is the rash of military coups now ravaging the new states of Africa.

To guard against this, we must borrow examples from older democracies. A case in point is the acceptance of a ministerial appointment by Sir Alec Douglas-Home (a former Prime Minister) under Edward Heath, the new Prime Minister of Britain. We do not see why our leaders cannot do the same. As a matter of fact, if they seek office at the state, local or community level after leaving the Prime Minister's Office, they go to show that these levels of government are of equal importance and their participation in them will energize and revitalize these levels of government.
We must point out that what helps consensus to emerge is the adoption of common values in relation to concepts of authority and social purpose as well as in respect of norms of behaviour.

For these to emerge, our political systems must make people have a stake in them. We see this as a function of conscientious leadership; leadership in government, community, industry, schools and churches.

**FOOTNOTES**


2. Ibid., p.89.

3. Ibid., p.89.


5. Ranney, Austin, op. cit., p.91.


ARTICLES

17. Ranney, Austin, op. cit.