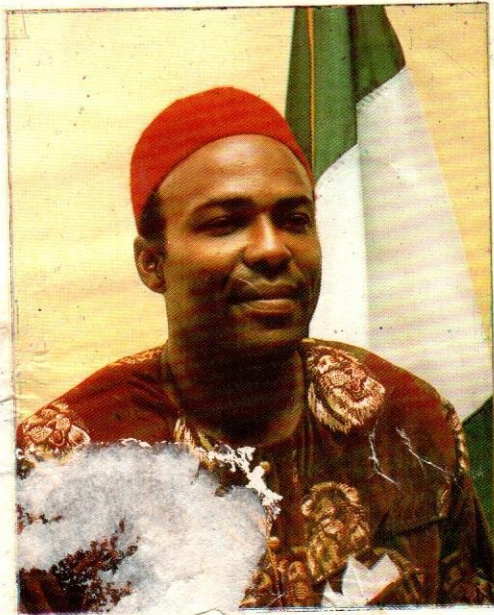


**DEMOCRACY AND THE SURVIVAL
OF THE
THIRD REPUBLIC IN NIGERIA**

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Ogonnaya Onu
Executive Governor of Abia State

DEMOCRACY AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC IN NIGERIA

*BEING A LECTURE DELIVERED BY
DR. OGBONNAYA ONU, GOVERNOR OF ABIA STATE
TO STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA
NSUKKA ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 1992 AT
NSUKKA, ENUGU STATE*

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Members of the Governing Council

Members of the Senate

Members of the Congregation

Members of the Academic Community

Lions and Lionesses

Ladies and Gentlemen

Just five days ago I got the invitation to be with you and to give a lecture on a subject of my choice. I thought it was a joke. How can I find time to do this having just been made a Chief Servant for over four million people living in one thousand, one hundred and forty-eight villages. I asked myself: Do these students want to know if I can still give a good lecture having left the university nearly a year ago? I had just concluded a rewarding practical work in the democratic process. Do the students already want to know what I have learnt? But I chuckled to myself and said ah'-ha', these students are a little too hasty; they should have waited for a few months so that they could also get a dose of my experience in the process of governance - sort of killing many bird with one stone. With these questions in my mind, I decided not to worry about

my delivery of the lecture, not to bother you with my practical experience in the field of the democratic process and of course to postpone any discussion of my experience in the art of governance till the appropriate time. Therefore, I have settled on simply talking to you about "Democracy and the survival of the Third Republic".

However, before I do so let me first thank you very sincerely for giving me this opportunity to interact and discuss with you, our future leaders and hope, my thoughts on democracy and our society. This opportunity coming this early in my tenure as the Chief Servant of Abia State is very important. It is important because I got into politics not only to do my very best to improve the lives and living standards of our people but also to demonstrate to our youths that politics can be clean and respectable; that government can be honest and caring; and that rulers can be humble and obedient to the will of the people in a democracy. It is therefore very pertinent that my first lecture on this subject is to you, our youth and my colleagues, on whom we rely for the full establishment and practice of democracy in our society.

All too often our social elites and political scientists, indulge in being self appointed judges comparing our attempts at democracy in Nigeria with the established democracies in Great Britain and America. Their obvious verdict is always that ours is a mockery of democracy. One can sympathise with such views but will not accept the verdict knowing that ours is a baby of barely thirty-two years compared to theirs of well over two hundred years. Indeed it may be appropriate to give us a pat on the back when it is recalled that Nigeria as a Nation State came into being in 1914 with the amalgamation of sub-national ethnic and other groups with diverse languages, dialects and cultures inhabiting vast areas of land. The period from 1914 to independence in 1960 witnessed a colonial rule which plundered our economy, dehumanised our people and debased our culture.

To have come from this bleak background to our present status in the development of a democratic society is no small feat. We must therefore pay tribute to all our national leaders who have at various times worked very hard, sacrificed their wealth and in some cases their lives to keep the process of democracy advancing in our Nation. May the souls of our fallen heroes and heroines who are no longer with us rest in peace! Permit me to single out the present Federal Military Administration for mention because it has more than any other administration in Nigerian history taken steps and instituted policies and programmes that have furthered the course of democracy and the development of Nigeria into a true nation-state.

One may agree or disagree with one or the other actions of this military administration but one cannot seriously disagree that the overall impact of these actions on the Nigerian society has been positive and progressive. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), though painful as it is, has made Nigeria look inwards to develop her own resources and hence economic self-reliance a pre-requisite to true democracy and political stability. The Privatization and Commercialization of government-owned companies, the deregulation of our banks; the development of true free market economy; the entrance of the private sector into such economic sectors as the Airline industry and sooner than later the electronic media; all these are some of the economic measures which have added significantly to our economic development and some steps towards the enhancement of our economic freedom. In our earlier past, government was the only body with the means and resources to establish industries and businesses and hence became almost the only employer. In the process of our development we have come to know that government is not best suited to run industries and that it is this involvement of government in the management of industries and business that has brought the nation to near economic collapse.

Most of Nigeria's external debt of about 33 billion U.S. dollars and internal debt of about 85 billion are due to these mismanaged businesses of government that have become bottomless pits over the years. To get government out of this burden of managing businesses and allow it to concentrate on its traditional role of providing social amenities and services and creating conducive atmosphere for private sector businesses, in other words the businesses of the people, to thrive is most welcome and a positive step towards economic emancipation. In Rousseau's "The Social Contract" he answered the question "What is the end that a body politic serves?" by saying it is the preservation and prosperity of its members. These are exactly the objectives that all governments must pursue. Government must stop the concept of its being a free-wheeling economic actor and de-emphasize its dominance in the economic life of the people. Instead government should restrict itself to the role of a regulator, a stimulator, a guide and operate in the spirit of a community leader mobilizing its citizens in an enthusiastic and friendly partnership to make the society great. This is the only true role of government in a free democracy where government is "of the people, by the people and for the people". If you have been following events in our young but blessed Abia State, the only State whose name appears in the Holy Bible of God, (Luke 1 (v); Matthew 1 (vii)) you will observe that within the two weeks that I have been in office, I have met with all interest groups in the State - the Traditional Rulers, Chairmen of Local Governments, the Legislators, the Public Servants, the Leaders of various Town Unions and community Leaders, Labour Leaders, Student Leaders, the organised labour, professional associations, Chambers of commerce, Alumni Associations, and many other organizations. I have met with everybody in the state to jointly discuss the development of the West, the task of governing Abia State, God's Own State, from the beginning when partitioned, to the present days. The

I have highlighted some of the economic policies and programmes of this military administration which have taken us some steps further towards establishing a true democratic, economically free society in our nation. This is not the only area that qualifies for special mention in the history of our democratic experience as a nation. I had earlier mentioned that the Nigerian Nation-State was born in 1914 with the impressive conglomeration of sub-national ethnic and other groups with differing languages and cultures. These sub-national groups remain intact with distinct identities over the years despite all attempts by succeeding administrations to forge a "first unity" as suggested by our veteran Nationalist and revered elder statesman, the Owelle of Onitsha, Doctor Nnamdi Azikiwe this week. The establishment of the three tier system of government, (Federal, State and Local Government), the creation of more states and local government areas; the emphasis on the development of our rural areas; the restriction to two political parties and the systematic execution of the transition programme are all programmes and policies of the present military administration that have begun to effectively address the geo-political problems of our nation which had in the past made the practice of democracy very difficult if not downright impossible. The courage shown by the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, General Ibrahim Badamasi is laudable and should be appreciated.

Perhaps a closer look at some of these measures which were introduced and executed by the present Federal Administration will bring out more clearly their long-term implications for an enduring civil society and a stable Third Republic. One of the things for which the Federal Government under General Babangida will be remembered is the introduction of grassroots politics into our political system. One of the major achievements of the present administration is the management of industrial relations and the prevention of a general economic collapse. The introduction of grassroots politics which has led to the awareness and involvement of the masses in the affairs of the political parties and

greater say in who governs them and how they are governed, the government is bound to be more responsive to the wishes, hopes and aspirations of the people.

The establishment of MAMSER and the DFRRRI has further concentrated focus on the grassroots and the rural dwellers and thus enhanced the standard of living in the rural areas as well as increased the level of awareness and vocality of the hitherto down-trodden masses. This, you would agree with me, guarantees responsiveness and accountability on the part of the government and party leaders which of course leads to greater contentment by the people and a more stable Third Republic.

Going hand in hand with the grassroots political experiment is the introduction of the two-party system and its initial funding by the Federal Government. The establishment of two parties has brought in more stability into the transition programme because the parties are more viable and represent wider shades of opinion and ensures diversification of the participatory ethnic, religious as well as interest groups in each party. This indeed is a healthy development towards a more stable Third Republic. Furthermore, initial financial support given to the two recognised political parties by the Federal Government ensured that the parties were not "hijacked" by the so-called "money bags". The limiting of the powers of the "money bags" by this single act of government, has firmly entrenched the powers and participatory rights of the grass-roots in the formulation of party policies and the implementation of its programmes. Moreover, the recent gubernatorial elections have justified the reasoning behind the two-party system. The election results clearly show that the two parties have a national outlook and are well spread. We have both the NRC and SPP represented in the West, East and the North. This is a welcome development from the point of view of the people when parties were previously identified with particular geographical areas. The December 1990 elections have shown

that no party dominates any particular area. In the gubernatorial elections, the victory of NRC in Lagos State and SDP in Anambra State clearly attest to the growing political maturity of the country. That we aggressively pursued and sustained the policy of democratisation even before the wind of democracy began to blow across Eastern Europe and most of Africa should be a source of pride to all of us. That the Federal Government set up structures and institutions such as MAMSER, DFRRI, the Centre for Democratic Studies and the Code of Conduct Bureau for the sustenance of democracy is very reassuring indeed.

The recently-concluded national population census and indeed, the recent creation of states and local government areas are fundamental stabilising factors in our transition programme which have given more Nigerians a greater sense of belonging and thus a greater commitment to the destiny of the Nigerian Nation. The Federal Government should be commended specially for granting greater autonomy to the local governments as the first tier of government. This ensures that governance is brought closer to the grassroots. The increase in the statutory allocation from 15% to 20% made to the local governments from the federally generated revenue is a further testimony that the government at the centre is firmly committed to an enduring democracy at the grassroots and improved condition of living for the masses. It is indeed a welcome development.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is as clear as daylight, however, that the second tier of government, made up of state governments, is the closest to the people of the Nation after the local governments. It is, therefore, unfair to increase the share of the local governments in direct proportion to the reduction suffered by the state governments. Because the responsibilities of the state governments do not show any sign of decreasing, but rather to the contrary, it is most politic that the allocation to states should

not be reduced. It is instructive, perhaps at this juncture to remind ourselves that the 1989 Constitution provides for free secondary and adult literacy education as well as free and adequate health services as part of the responsibilities of the States. Reduction of the States share of the Federal Revenue would make it difficult for the second tier of government to fulfil its statutory obligations to its areas of jurisdiction.

If such a situation arises, it would need no stretch of the imagination to visualise the degree of disaffection that would be generated as a result of the inability of the elected governors to fulfil their statutory obligations and election promises to their people.

In short, state governments would not be able to provide adequately for the "welfare of the people" in their areas of responsibility as provided by the Constitution if they are deprived of the wherewithal to meet their constitutional obligations. Because reasonable good standard of living and contentment are concomitants to political stability and the development of democratic principles and culture, reduction of the revenue allocation to states might breed discontent among the people which might lead to instability. In view of the fact that the basic needs of man are food, good health, shelter and education, special attention should be paid to increased agricultural production, provision of well-equipped primary and secondary health facilities, adequate and affordable houses and functional and qualitative education.

When it comes to food production, storage, processing, preservation and marketing, the states are better placed to assist the people, know their problems and provide them with the necessary inputs for increased agricultural production within their borders. Educational facilities at the primary level have already been appropriately given to the states. These, as well as services provided to some degree tertiary) education, health as well as shelter, for the daily lives of our people and community development fall within the

responsibilities of state governments which can reach more people than the government at the Centre.

I also believe that the local and state governments should have responsibility of setting up small-scale and medium-scale industries while the responsibility for heavy industries should be left to the Federal Government. At this level of our development, it is my considered opinion that the Federal Government should concentrate its energies and resources on security, defence, external affairs, maintenance of law and order and spelling out the overall policy direction governing our socio-economic development. Such a change will eliminate the present situation where there appears to be a duplication of efforts by both state and federal governments with the resultant waste of human and material resources. The states have the manpower and will only require the allocation of appropriate funds to accomplish the task more effectively. The same is true for roads except for the inter-state highways.

For good governance and democracy to thrive, thereafter, the people must be contented - both at the local and state government levels. For this goal of general contentment to be realised, the revenue allocation formula needs to be reviewed to take care of the increased responsibilities which would devolve on the state governments when the Constitution finally comes into full effect.

We would wish to recommend an allocation formula of the Federal Revenue as follows: Local Governments, 20%; States, 35%; Federal Government 40% and Special Fund 5%. You would notice that our recommendation favours increased allocations to the local and state governments. Our reason for this is that the "objectives of development is man himself", and since the local and state governments are the closest to the people, they need the increased allocations to help them meet the increased burden in the areas of food, clothing, health, shelter, education, etc. which are all people-centred, and which will fall all on them when the Constitution

implemented. Our polity, as I said earlier, cannot hope to be stable, democratic and egalitarian in the face of hunger and unfulfilled promises and denied expectations.

Going into the details of the allocation proper, one would wish to see "Internal Revenue Effort" playing a greater role among the criteria for the distribution of the national wealth. The present 10% weighting accorded to it should be increased to 20% to act as an incentive to increased revenue efforts by the various states of the Federation. Another area that needs to be reviewed and given a greater weighting in the revenue allocation formula is population which should get more than the 30% allocated to it in the current revenue formula because as we have pointed out earlier, the main objectives of all development efforts is man himself.

To reduce the continued request for more states which could result in proliferation of States that are unviable and therefore lead to instability, the allocation made on the basis of equality of States should be reduced. Conversely, the special funds allocated to ecological matters should be increased because our future is tied to how we are able to protect and nourish our environment, and if we lose all our land to erosion and desertification, we might find ourselves in a big trouble because most of our land resources would become diminished or extinct. We therefore recommend that the sliding scale decline from 1% to 0.5% should be adopted for the Federal Capital Territory, particularly as its stature will change as soon as a Mayor is elected, while the savings made therefrom would go to general ecology.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the course of my lecture, we have talked at length on revenue allocation because we are convinced that how the Federal Revenue is shared directly affects the survival of democracy in Nigeria and the stability of the Federal Republic. If adequate allocation is made to all tiers of government, they would be in a very advantageous position to meet the

needs and aspirations of the people which would guarantee future prosperity. More importantly, if adequate funds and infrastructure are made available at the State and Local Governments, there will be less scramble for positions and favours at the centre. This would result in reduced ethnic tension and regional struggle for control of the government at the centre because people at the state level would have ample opportunities to realise themselves and their ambitions.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must at this juncture register our deep appreciation of the people of Abia State, myself and other Nigerians to the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and his able lieutenants in the AFRC for the decisive manner they have been piloting the Transition to Civil Rule Programme. The political measures the Babangida administration has so far taken are a source of immense confidence to Nigerians that it is determined to enshrine democracy and social justice as a culture of the Nation as well as ensure a stable Third Republic. We would like to call for an increased allocation to States to ensure that the structures which the present Administration at the centre has wisely put in place, do not suffer or collapse as a result of lack of funds to meet the expectations and yearnings of the Nigerian masses.

It is also our humble opinion that as our history has been one of growth and development, each government should and must endeavour to improve on what past administrations had done as well as initiative on programmes and policies that will lead Nigeria towards economic freedom, political stability, and a true democratic society where our ethnic diversity will be forged into "first unity" and where social justice, peace and freedom of the individual will reign supreme.

Finally, let me seize this opportunity to thank the academic community for the support that it gave me during my electioneering campaigns. I can assure you that my success is entirely due to Dr. Ogonnaya Onu but to

the academic world in general and the Nigeria academia in particular. For most educated people in Nigeria, especially teachers, it is not usually easy to muster the resources that would lead us through the campaigns, but out of God's grace I am where I am. My success therefore would help to demonstrate to the world that money is not everything in Nigerian politics, and that the University Community has a lot to offer in governance.

Mr. Vice Chancellor and members of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Community, Lions and Lionesses, I will not end this address without praising you for your numerous and impressive achievements despite your limited resources. Your academic history has been a record of successes. Your graduate prosper in many fields of endeavour. With these your impressive records, I now call on all of us to join hands and use our large reserve of intellectual resources and past record of successes to ensure the survival of democracy in the Third Republic. I am convinced that the democratic experiment would be very successful indeed in Abia State because we have started on the right note. The good people of Abia have used their democratic rights to elect me as their Chief Servant. The choke was so overwhelming that over 72 out of every 100 voters chose me as their governor in the December 14, 1991 gubernatorial elections. And so far I have not failed them because since I was elected into Office, I have strived to reciprocate in the true spirit of democracy by consulting them in all my plans and policies in the State. I have held consultations with teachers, professional bodies, the chamber of commerce, Alumni associations, the civil servants, Heads of Federal establishments, Students and community leaders, traditional rulers, etc. I have met with all these people because I strongly believe that a democratic government must not only belong to the people; but the people must actively participate in its functions, I also believe, very strongly too, that democracy empowered the people to decide their fate politically, socially and economically.

I have, therefore, deliberately made it possible that the people of Abia State will exercise their democratic powers and functions in every facet of government activities. I have also instituted regular consultations between the State and Local Governments through the establishment of the Joint Consultative Council in the State, comprising the Governor, Deputy Governor and Chairmen of Local Governments. This Council will make it possible for the first two tiers of government to interact just as the 2nd and 3rd tier interact through the National Council of States. This is in addition to the regular meetings with traditional rulers and town unions which I have initiated. The whole idea is to ensure the growth of the democratic process in Nigeria and the survival of the Third Republic.

I therefore seize this opportunity to call on all Nigerians to give democracy a chance and let the will of the people prevail. Any other alternative to democracy is not acceptable. Like the preacher said: "If you have what is more precious than God, do not give it to me".

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the students today.

Thank you very much indeed.

