

Broadcast to the Nation
by Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi
24th May 1966

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THE REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

Broadcast to the Nation

by

His Excellency

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Head of the National Military Government and

Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces

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The main objectives of the next Plan will be a high overall rate of growth with a view to achieving "self-sustained growth" before the end of the Perspective Plan; the rapid industrialisation of the economy; increased production of food for domestic consumption without relaxing efforts in the export sector, and drastic reduction in the magnitude of the present unemployment problem. Other objectives include increased diversification of the economy, a more equitable distribution of incomes among persons and the maintenance of a reasonable measure of stability through appropriate instruments of policy. As it is realised that all these specified objectives are not entirely consistent, efforts will be made to strike a reasonable balance between them. A high rate of growth is, however, regarded as the most important objective of the Plan, so that in most cases a high priority will be accorded to projects capable of generating a high growth rate. Accordingly, in the allocation of investment during the next Plan, agriculture and industry will be given high priority while social and administrative sectors will be given a low priority since some of these have already claimed more than is proportionately due to them under the current Plan.

Very careful attention will be given to the estimation of available resources. While every effort will be made to attract and utilise foreign aid, it is considered that the bulk of the burden of implementing the next Plan will be borne by Nigerians themselves. Judging by the experience so far gained in the implementation of the current Plan, it is not expected that more than 40 per cent of the capital required for implementing the next Plan will come from foreign resources.

A plan of the magnitude envisaged cannot succeed without the goodwill and support of all sections of the community. Efforts will, therefore, be made as far as possible to ensure that the whole community will be involved in the planning exercise and to bring the Plan to the homes of all citizens of the country as every Nigerian will have to make some sacrifices. Steps will, however, be taken to ensure that the sacrifices which people will be called upon to make in different parts of the country keep in step with each other.

My Government is determined to push ahead as quickly as possible with the Iron and Steel Project. Studies of the project have indeed taken longer than expected but will be appreciated that in view of the tremendous impact which its establishment would have on the Nigerian economy and the great cost involved, it is essential that the necessary economic and technical studies be undertaken in detail. As Steel is a basic commodity, the industrial future of the country depends on the provision of steel which is competitively priced as cheaply as possible. Dear steel means some dearer building materials, dearer cars and car parts, machinery parts, many household utensils and gadgets, etc. Looking ahead to the future when Nigeria will produce these things and export some, it is necessary to avoid decisions which place Nigerian economy at a permanent cost/price disadvantage. The importance of detailed studies of the project required to determine the iron-making process to be adopted and the optimum size of the plant cannot be over-emphasised. I should be able to report on the final shape of the project as soon as possible.

My Government has also decided to establish a salt manufacturing industry in Nigeria because of its economic importance. A number of proposals have been received and negotiations are proceeding with a view to establishing two plants each of 75,000-tons capacity to produce light density salt.

The need for orientation of the Nigerian university system to meet our national needs has been identified. In the first place the present distribution of students between the two broad disciplines labelled 'Humanities' and 'Science' is not satisfactory and does not accord with our national needs. For example, in the session 1965-66, some 4,214 students are registered for degrees in Arts and Social Science and 3,313 in Pure and Applied Sciences, or in terms of percentages 56 for Humanities and 44 for Science. This is clearly not in keeping with the policy for higher education laid down for our Universities that for every 100 students admitted 60 should be taking courses in Pure and Applied Sciences and 40 in Humanities.

The Universities have also departed from our policy for higher education by duplicating instead of complementing each other in almost all the courses they offer. Emphasis seems to be placed on the size of student intake rather than the size and quality of output. If this state of things is allowed to continue unchecked, Nigeria will never meet her requirements for Science graduates and Technicians. In order to avoid such a situation a rationalisation of the university system is required. To this end I have appointed a Working Party comprising all the Vice-Chancellors to examine the problem and make recommendations. My Government will take necessary action after it has received the Working Party's report and carefully studied it.

My Government will also examine the desirability of establishing a National Revolving Loan Scheme proposed to reduce the heavy burden imposed on our limited resources by the existing scholarship policy.

As has been made known in a press release, Government is keeping the food situation under review and will not hesitate to make hoarding of foodstuffs a criminal offence since some people are known to be engaged in such bad practices. One of the decisions reached at the recent meeting of the Central Executive Council is the establishment of a Consultative Committee on Prices to advise Government on price trends and factors affecting them. The possibility of providing storage facilities at various market centres in the country, to store and distribute foodstuffs to consumers is also being examined. This study will be guided by an experimental pilot scheme in order to identify the problems involved in the various areas concerned.

The Rent Control Decree 1966 which was made recently is meant to provide temporary relief pending a more detailed examination of the problem and the introduction of comprehensive measures to deal with all the aspects of the problem. The matter is being actively pursued, and a supplementary decree and the regulations under the Rent Control Decree 1966 will be made as a matter of urgency to provide for standard equitable rents and for membership and operation of the Rent Tribunals.

It is now three months since the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was handed over to the Armed Forces. Now that peace has been restored in the troubled areas it is time that the Military Government indicates clearly what it proposes to accomplish before relinquishing power. The removal of one of the obstacles in the way is provided for in the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree (No. 5) 1966 which was promulgated by me to-day and comes into effect at once. The provisions of the Decree are intended to remove the last vestiges of the intense regionalism of the recent past, and to produce that cohesion in the governmental structure which is so necessary in achieving, and maintaining the paramount objective of the National Military Government, and indeed of every true Nigerian, namely, national unity.

The highlights of this Decree are as follows :—

The former regions are abolished, and Nigeria grouped into a number of territorial areas called, provinces. (The provinces concerned are set out in a schedule to the Decree).

Nigeria ceases to be what has been described as a federation. It now becomes simply the Republic of Nigeria.

The former Federal Military Government and the Central Executive Council become respectively the National Military Government and the Executive Council. All the Military Governors are members of the Executive Council.

A Military Governor is assigned to a group of provinces over which and subject to the direction and control of the Head of the National Military Government, he shall exercise executive power. In order to avoid any major dislocation of the present administrative machinery, the grouping of the provinces has been made to coincide with the former regional boundaries. This is entirely a transitional measure and must be understood as such. The present grouping of the provinces is without prejudice to the Constitutional and Administrative arrangements to be embodied in the New Constitution in accordance with the wishes of the people of Nigeria.

The National Military Government assumes the exercise of all legislative powers throughout the Republic subject to such delegations to Military Governors as are considered necessary for purposes of efficient administration.

The public services of the former federation and regions become unified into one National public service under a National Public Service Commission. There is a provincial Service Commission for each group of provinces to which is delegated functions in respect of public officers below a given rank. This rather drastic change will probably involve a reconstitution of the existing commissions, and the National Military Government reserves the right to do so in the manner stipulated in the Decree. Until this is done, the present Commissioners continue to act in their posts. Every civil servant is now called upon to see his function in any part of Nigeria in which he is serving in the context of the whole country. The orientation should now be towards national unity and progress. I expect all civil servants to co-operate and to consult at all levels, vertically and horizontally, between groups of Provinces and between Provinces and the Centre.

People are aware that Study Groups have been set up to look into various aspects of governmental activity. One of them is concerned with problems relating to the Constitution. This Decree is without prejudice to their activities and their reports will be given proper consideration by the National Military Government in formulating the proposals for a future civilian government.

In my nation-wide radio broadcast of January 28, 1966, I said, among other things: "We cannot afford to continue with sterile political strife and mutual recrimination. I have therefore ordered that there shall be no display of party flags or symbols, and no shouting of political slogans."

On March 3, I caused a press release to be issued calling attention to the fact that political meetings were, in spite of my order, being held in certain parts of the country, and warning the public and the press to co-operate with the Federal Military Government in its task of national reconstruction.

In spite of these warnings, political party activities still continue, either directly, or through various tribal societies and organisations. The National Military Government owes it a duty to the people of this country to remove the ills which infested the former regime, to restore the faith of our people in their fatherland and its institutions, so that when the time comes for the civilian government to return, a healthy body politic would have emerged and last vestiges of bitter factionalism removed.

The National Military Government having committed itself to this task, is firmly resolved to conclude it, and will not be diverted from, or obstructed in, the fulfilment of this objective by the activities or political manoeuvres of any society, party, union or association. Part of the task is the removal of politics based on tribal affiliations which, as everybody knows, have manifested political intrigues, or have been used as bases for party-political propaganda.

This leads me to the removal of the second obstacle in the way for which provision has been made in the Public Order Decree 1966, which I have signed to-day and which comes into operation forthwith, dissolving all organisations of the type scheduled therein, and banning any manifestations of their political purposes. These organisations have been dissolved and will be buried along with the tribal, sectional and regional bitterness which they engendered. Certain types of associations and organisations are unaffected, and will remain so, only for as long as they do not engage in any political activity. It is the cardinal aim of my Government to foster the growth of town development unions, membership of which should be open to all inhabitants of the particular town irrespective of their tribal origin. This does not mean for instance that Efiks residing outside Calabar should not contribute towards the development of Calabar development union but it does mean that a Tiv or a Hausa residing in Calabar should be eligible for membership and should be allowed to participate fully in the development of that town.

This Decree also prohibits the formation of new political parties. I must emphasize however that the ban on the formation of new political parties is of limited duration and is designed to enable this corrective government to get on with its task especially at this initial stage. At the appropriate time provisions will be made outlining the procedure for the formation of new political associations.

I want however to leave no doubt in the mind of anybody, that the provisions of this decree will certainly be enforced. This is a Military Regime and soldiers do not allow themselves to be diverted from or obstructed in the fulfilment of their objectives. With us the objectives will be pursued with supreme determination and vigour. In this we need not only the co-operation but the Discipline of every Nigerian.

I wish to make it clear that the prohibition of the formation of new political associations has no sinister motive. The limitation period until the 17th of January, 1969 may be reduced if the Military Government accomplishes its aims before then. Our determination is that until the two decrees I have signed to-day are abrogated, every individual should be preoccupied with the task of national reconstruction, not as ex-politician or politician, but simply as a Nigerian with faith in his country's destiny.

Malicious rumours designed to mar our national reconstruction continue to be carried about by certain individuals in spite of my repeated warnings. Cases of impersonation of officers of the Armed Forces are still reported. I have to warn again those who indulge in these criminal acts to discipline themselves forthwith and not to provoke us into taking very drastic measures which may otherwise become necessary.

In pursuance of its policy for achieving national unity, my Government is setting up a body to review all the existing Government-sponsored newspapers in the context of national unity. This body will also recommend the most effective organisation for running the Information, Broadcasting and Television Services in the country and the financial implications involved.

I must not end this broadcast without pointing out a recent development which, if not checked, will adversely affect the morale of the Civil Service and thereby hamper our national reconstruction. By this I mean the unnecessary criticisms recently being levelled against the Civil Service by certain sections of the Press. It is common knowledge that civil servants are expected to tender advice to Ministers but it was not obligatory on the part of the former Ministers to accept advice so tendered. It will therefore be wrong to blame civil servants for mistakes made by their Ministers who in many cases did not accept the advice given to them by these officers.

I have to make it abundantly clear to everyone that my Government will continue the services of the present civil servants. However, my Government believes in maintaining the highest standard of efficiency in the Civil Service and will not hesitate to do away with anyone found guilty of inefficiency, nepotism, tribalism and corruption.

I therefore wish to appeal to all newspaper editors and columnists to look for a profitable pastime and desist from criticising civil servants unnecessarily especially when they realise that because of the tradition of their calling, civil servants are barred from criticising themselves on the pages of newspapers. Such attacks will certainly not help the Government and is sure eventually to demoralise members of the Public Service who are rendering such noble service to this nation under difficult conditions. If any member of the public has any genuine case against any civil servant, he or she should make a report to the appropriate quarters.

We are determined to accomplish the main tasks we have set ourselves. The problems involved are being studied by the various working parties which I have formed. Whilst these studies are in progress my Government cannot remain at a standstill and will therefore forge ahead in the meantime. As a corrective regime we must ensure that the maladies of the past are cured before we relinquish power. We propose as a last act for the country an accurate count as well as a Constitution which will guarantee unity, stability and true democracy to all Nigerians everywhere. Investigations are proceeding into the activities of ex-politicians of the former regime. Any of them found guilty will be dealt with according to Law irrespective of their position in the community. My Government will then be utilising the services of those who have not been found wanting and who are prepared to work in the context of national unity.

Nigerians must understand and respect one another in the new national spirit. Ex-politicians in different camps who previously regarded one another as enemies should forget the past and work together for the common good.

With the dissolution of political parties and tribal unions I want all Nigerians everywhere in Nigeria to regard one another not as strangers but as Nigerians with common national interests irrespective of their tribe or place of origin. From henceforth no reference to tribe or place of origin will appear in any official document.

A formula for identifying backward areas will be worked out and measures taken for the improvement of such areas. We must grow more food crops as well as cash crops. We must patronise our home-made goods even where they appear to vary in standard with the imported ones. Government is taking steps to establish an organisation which will ensure that goods made in Nigeria comply with national standard specifications.

Finally, I appeal to all Nigerians and friends of Nigeria to co-operate with the Government in the difficult task of national reconstruction.

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