**RE: TOWARDS 2023: SHOULD THE NORTH-CENTRAL STILL BE LEFT OUT?**

By Idoko Michael Onoja

The recent chart published by the **North Central Unity Bridge**, popularly called: **The Bridge** on the power rotation among the regions since independence is as revealing as it is apt and thought-provoking. Relating this to the salient messages contained in the chart by The Bridge, we may paraphrase the German philosopher, Karl Marx that: “Philosophers have sufficiently interpreted the world; the task however is how to change the world”. In other words, while the North-Central political elites have very cogent reasons to lament the loud and unjust seclusion of the region from the power equation so far, the question remains: What are they doing to change the region’s political fortunes in the face of on-going scrambling and scheming by their counterparts in the other regions?

With the 2023 election circle barely two years away, the shoving, jaw-jaw and jostling for the political soul of the country has been gathering momentum through a myriad of channels spheres of political power-play. The agitators for the Presidency in 2023 have taken their campaign through subterranean and frenzied, open mobilization at community levels, regional, national and even on the international fora.

Viewed through the prism of their logic, Nigerians should surrender the Presidency to them on the platter of ethnic or regional parameters, thereby, elevating ethnic and such other primordial considerations over democracy, equity and fair-play. To the Ndi-Igbo of the South-East geopolitical region, the argument is buttressed on the postulation that, “of the major ethnic groups in the country, only the Igbo-speaking people have not had a go at the highest political office since our independence in 1960”. Related to this is the notion that the South-East geopolitical zone is the only zone that has been, “left out in the rotation of power at the highest level”. However, as reinforced in the chart by The Bridge Unity Forum, the claims of ‘deliberate’ exclusion of the South-East are fallacious, inaccurate and distortive in the historical perspectives.

Political gladiators in the South-West geopolitical zone are similarly angling for the coveted position apparently wanting to leverage on the region’s population and homogeneity that traditionally have tended to give them a degree of relevance in national political contests. What is more, the ‘central’ or ‘critical’ role played by politicians in that region in the emergence of the political contraption, the APC, and the eventual presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, is being flaunted as a bargaining chip or even and as an ace card in 2023.

From records, the North-West geopolitical zone has had shots at the nation’s pinnacle of political leadership in 1979 to 1983 with President Shehu Aliyu Shagari; President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua, 2007 to 2010 and President Muhammadu Buhari, 2015 to date (with a terminal date of 2023). Yet, from Nigeria north of the River Niger, the North-East produced the first and only Prime Minister for Nigeria in the person of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1960 – 1966). Looking at it from the North-South divide, the Southern part of the country has experienced the presidencies of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999 to 2007 (South-West) and that of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, 2010 to 2015, (South-South).

While the focus has been on the position of the number one citizen, it is also very pertinent that we take a cursory but significant reference to persons who have occupied positions of second-in-command to political leaders mentioned above. Chief Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme was Vice President all through the tenure of Alhaji Shehu Shagari; Abubakar Atiku deputised for Chief Olusegun Obasanjo; Umaru Musa Yar’Adua ran on the same ticket with Goodluck Ebele Jonathan while, Arc. Mohammed Namadi Sambo was Vice President between 2010 to 2015. Let’s not to forget that two persons of South-East or Ndi-Igbo extraction have also at different times being at the helm of affairs of the country. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first Governor-General of an independent Nigeria (1960-1963); the first President, (1963-1966) and Dr Nwafor Orizu Ag Prime Minister, between the demise of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi.

Talking therefore of equity and fairness, or political marginalization, the North-Central zone, by far, have more reasons to be aggrieved and therefore, more deserving and qualified to be allowed to take the next shot at the nation’s political leadership in 2023. From inception, it is the zone that has NOT played any frontline role at the centre of the nation’s political leadership tableau from the first Republic through to the nascent representative democracy. Unlike the Ndi-Igbo, or their kins in the south of the country, nobody from the entire North-Central region has ever emerged as President, Vice President, or even a Presidential running mate of any of the major political parties which has at one time or the other, ruled at the centre. Not even in the ill-fated SDP and NRC was any indigene of the zone considered as a Presidential candidate or a running mate.

Those who believe that their acts of shenanigans, violence or blackmail can win for them the empathy and votes of majority of Nigerians, are getting it all wrong by thinking that the Yoruba-speaking people of the South-West were ‘gifted’ the Presidency in 1999 as a consequence of the agitation of the restoration of the MKO Abiola mandate of June 12th 1993. This is a gross distortion of that epochal turn in the nation’s political trajectory. The victory and later, the struggle for the actualization of the Abiola mandate was the collective action of all Nigerians across the geopolitical zones. In other words, the Nigerian Presidency as demonstrated in the 1993 Presidential election can only be won by a Nigerian with nationwide appeal and NOT on the platter of some ethnic or similar elemental, primordial sentiments.

The people of the North-Central geopolitical zone have produced eminent citizens who have profoundly contributed and are still contributing, to the erection of the pillars of the Nigerian social, economic, and political advancement of the Nigerian nation-state. Alas, in spite of their selfless contributions however, the region has not been recognised and rewarded in commensurate measures *vis-a-vis* what other regions have benefitted from the Nigerian project. This throws up the puzzle: What are the special qualifications, criteria, or parameters should apply in the consideration of which of the six geopolitical zones should next produce the apex leadership of our dear country? Beside the historical exclusion and in injustice that the region has glaringly and incontrovertibly suffered in the context of “power rotation” the North-Central is eminently qualified on the criteria of population, landmass, human and natural resource endowments that have kept the Nigerian nation-state working.

That is just, of course, as the candidate so presented from the region must be eminently qualified on the requisite credentials and antecedents of a pan-Nigerian visionary with nationwide reach and acceptance. Unless if the people of the North-Central region of the country are being told that rancorous agitations advanced in the garbs of threats, blackmail and arm-twisting rather than patriotic commitment to one indivisible, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria are the ‘merits’ for ascending the topmost political position of the land.

The crux of the entire argument is that, for equity, justice and fair-play, the age-old but subtle, non-virulent craving by the North-Central region for the Presidency of Nigeria, should be robustly and overwhelmingly supported by the other component sections and groups of the country in 2023.

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