

## CAN OBASANJO LEAVE ANY LEGACY?

By

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The events of the last few weeks has shown that no matter what happens the will of the people will always prevail where there is rule of law. Contrary to popular opinion that there is no law in Nigeria the law has prevailed in spite of the heavy handed way the issue was handled by some agents of the government and those in opposition as well. It also showed Nigerians are now ready and willing to take their destiny into their own hands.

On this occasion there was what seemed to be a common enemy. The machinery of the popular opposition coalesced into a very effective propaganda machine as it was fuelled by rumour and a very perfidious press. All these must have taken the General by surprise and Generals do not like being taken by surprise. In spite of the influence of the party machinery to keep PDP legislators in line, their individuality, belief and patriotism prevailed for the benefit of the common good of Nigerians.

Their action obviously damned the party's Godfathers as they voted with their heads instead of their pockets or their toes.

While I respect those who came out strongly to support either side of the debate based on their beliefs and conviction and good reasons for doing so, I was appalled by those who have been described as straddling the fence like the female senator from Edo state. Daisy Danjuma's contribution was the most ambiguous of them all. She could not come out completely against the spouse's instruction nor could she come out against her party's directive. At that level of politics, one must be seen to belong and send unambiguous messages and for good reason.

The greatest loser was the President as the press had a field day baying and tearing at him from all sides. Did he deserve that treatment? Not in the least. In a way he may have contributed by his mute stance. All he needed to say was he will let the House of Assembly decide and he will abide by their decision very early in the debate. He did say it, but it came too late. His continued silence fuelled rumours and he came out the worst for it. The free press he helped nurtured has come back to hunt him. President Obasanjo deserves better press coverage.

He will be remembered as the leader who brought Nigeria from the cold, a pariah nation to dine on the same table as eminent nations of the world. As a statesman his influence stretches from Cape to Cairo and he was particularly effective in the West Africa sub region spreading peace and settling conflicts thereby reducing loss of African lives.

Nearer home he demonstrated he is a true democrat by his actions in the Ivory Coast, Togo and Equatorial Guinea in subduing military coups d'etat. His good judgement was again demonstrated when he accepted Charles Taylor of Liberia into Nigeria, this singular action reduced the total death from that conflict.

His economic team moved the national economy from the mud to a respectable position where a stable Nigerian naira is now quoted in international exchange rates. His good fortunes coupled with the hike in the price of crude oil in international market, led to the nation's ability to offset our external debt and increase our external reserve. The Nigerian on

the street expected more from their leader hence they fought against the hike in the price of petrol in the country.

A lot of the economic processes already set in motion by this administration may not be obvious to all presently but will yield dividends in the future for all Nigerians to benefit if we follow the economic policies closely and correctly. Obasanjo has done a great deal for Nigeria and Africa but there is still more to be done. The fight against corruption and the re-orientation of the value system of Nigerians must be pursued vigorously.

Obasanjo is no saint but he has done a lot for this nation and simultaneously made many enemies especially in the corruption campaign and giving Nigeria a new lease of life. He unfortunately surrounded himself with people known to the electorate with dubious character like Chief Anenih a man known to have siphoned the vote for road reconstruction and maintenance as Federal Works Minister. A group in the North are particularly angry with Obasanjo due to his close association with Anenih.

Till date Obasanjo has still not paid official visits to some states in the federation and such states like Edo State have not benefited from this government as there is no evidence of Federal government presence in the state. This attitude may stem from the non performance of some of the state governors but in Edo State, in addition to the non performance of Lucky Igbinedion's administration, a lot believe the evil hand of Anenih is to blame due to his feud with Edo State governor.

Edo state has particularly come out worse in spite of producing the late first lady and Chief Tony Anenih a close associate of the president has absolutely nothing to show as patronage from this government to the annoyance of Edo people.

Can Obasanjo still leave a legacy? The answer is a resounding yes. In the next few months he should personally take over the implementation of all he has started in the Niger Delta. He has voted billions of naira to the development of the Niger Delta; he should personally take control to ensure that the development projects initiated by this administration, move quickly from the drawing board to visible realities on the ground for the Niger-Delta people to see. This singular action will placate the people and influence members of MEND to stop their destructive activities. Particularly he should dialogue with the group Movements for the Emancipation of the Niger delta (MEND). Contrary to advice, he should avoid strong arm tactics in dealing with fellow Nigerians. The message should be that Rome was not built in day and as such members of MEND and the Niger Delta people should give the government time for complete implementation of the new government programmes. The people of the Niger Delta must also appreciate the efforts of this administration in identifying the problem of the region and redressing the situation with favourable policies. In this particular situation, failed promises and non-implementation will not augur well for the nation or for the president. Simultaneously, our people should increase vigilance in the Niger Delta to prevent other saboteurs from elsewhere doing havoc to our national economy under cover of MEND activities. Peace in the Niger Delta will be Obasanjo's best legacy to the nation and posterity.

In the few months left of his tenure, he should ensure he visits all Nigerian States officially and distribute some federal government patronage to these states to increase their sense of belonging to the Nigerian Nation.

Nigerians are tired of military rulers, in uniform or mufti so while scouting for a successor, he should be careful to pick a popular thorough-breed civilian individual acceptable to a greater proportion of Nigerians; a thorough Obasanjo loyalist who will progress this administration

economic reform to a new height. Whereas all the oppositions coalesced to fight him on the issue of tenure elongation, as soon as the campaign for 2007 elections is officially underway, the presidential candidates will be at each others throat and he can have a breathing space to complete the implementation of his legacy. His endorsement of any candidate should be at critical time when it is obvious that candidate has more than 50% chance of success at the polls. It must not be too early or too late. If it is too early, all the other presidential aspirants will join forces against him.

These of us old enough will remember Obasanjo's activities from the Nigerian civil war through to his period as head of state that ended with the first ever hand over of a military regime to a civilian government are already familiar with his contribution to the Nigerian nation. His legacy now is really for the younger generation of Nigerians. Obasanjo has the singular opportunity to put the country on the path to greatness and he is well on the way in doing that. He should now look beyond failed tenure elongation attempt which he has accepted as a good spirited sportsman.

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