



Administrative Challenges: A Study of Jim Nwobodo Administration In The Old Anambra State, 1979-1983:

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria reverted to civilian democratic rule in 1979 after 13 years of uninterrupted military dictatorship. Backed by the political structure of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) in Nigeria's South East, Jim Nwobodo got elected as Governor of the old Anambra State in the July 28, 1979 gubernatorial elections. His leadership style impacted negatively on the state's industries leading to the collapse of almost all the state owned industries and corporations. The Nkalagu cement industry, the Niger Steel Company Limited, Emene, the Premier Brewery Limited, and other State owed establishments like Agriculture Development Corporation, the Anambra State Housing Corporation where all run aground as a result of maladministration, nepotism and systemic corruption. This paper examines how the twin evils of nepotism and favoritism which were the cardinal points of his administration impacted on the state industries and corporations with profound implications on the state and its people. The work employed both secondary and primary sources of evidence especially oral interviews.

Keywords: Anambra State, democratic rule, Nwobodo's administration, nepotism

INTRODUCTION

When General Murtala Mohammed moved the nation's state structure from twelve to nineteen, there was a lot of hope and optimism among the people in the new states that were created. The optimism rested on the fact that with increased earnings from oil, the new states will witness accelerated development and growth. Anambra State was one of the new States that were created. The creation of the states by General Murtala Mohammed regime was indeed received with much pomp and celebration. Lofty hopes were shared by the generality of the people that the State will witness accelerated development and growth.

The basis for this strong hope was apparent. First was the quality of the State's human resources. The State had ample university graduates in various fields of learning. To above could be added the general ingenuity and entrepreneurship of the Igbo-man. Besides, Anambra State is the birth-place of some of Nigeria's most enlightened, respected and creative minds in the country. There was indeed, every reason to be optimistic. But these hopes were dashed by the Nwobodo's administration. The regime elevated favoritism and nepotism to unprecedented levels in the governing process. These twin evils permeated the

economic, political and social lives of the State and impacting negatively on its development. This paper intends to examine its impact on the industries and corporations in the period under review.

The Policy of Favoritism and its Impact on Nkalagu Cement Factory 1979-1983

As stated earlier, favoritism and nepotism were elevated to an institution in governance during the administration of Jim Nwobodo. These twin evils impacted negatively on the State's industries and corporations during his administration between 1979 and 1983. This was what made Arthur Nwankwo (1982) to declare that Nwobodo's administration will not be remembered for any success in the industrial sector. As shall be seen shortly, the twin maladies of the period under review were to result in social tensions and conflicts between the generality of the people and workers on one side, and his administration on the other. The severity of such tensions and conflicts was often determined by the degree of such vices in governance and the level of tolerance by the suffering masses. In Anambra State during his administration, the endurance level of the people got to point of inelasticity and inevitability of workers demonstrations, rioting s and eventually their embarking on an indefinite industrial action.

At Nkalagu Cement Factory jointly owned by the then Imo and Anambra State governments for instance, the nature of malice bothered on government's manipulations of factory management with the intention of controlling its funds and finances (Arthur, 1982:31). The welcome address presented by the Southern Anambra employees of the company in 1982 to their Excellencies, the governors of Anambra and Imo States is instructive and informative. The said address was delivered during the governors' second official visit to the company prompted by the incessant and intractable crisis besetting the company (Arthur 1982).

Peace was sought in this premier and foremost industry in the southeast because Governor Jim Nwobodo removed the then general Manager Engr.S.V Iiodibia and in his place, appointed Engineer H. C. N. Adibe, a non-employee of the company. The governor's imposition of an outsider, Engineer Adibe on the company as the General Manager removing the then substantive general manager murdered peace in the company. His action was in total disregard to established rules and procedures. Besides, it was said that he had no cause for removing the then incumbent General Manager. His reason it was opined, was to install a 'son of the soil', Engr Adibe as the Chief Executive of the company. Since Engr. Iiodibia came from Northern Anambra, he should not head a factory in Southern Anambra. Many however were of the opinion that the Governor's real intention was to gain easy access to the company funds, something that was denied him by the former GM.

Beyond that, the governor's agenda for the company seems to have gone further than that. Employees of Anambra North origin (the governor's immediate consistency) in the company were also said to have been posted to head most sensitive sections in the company with little or no regard to qualification, seniority and suitability. Worse still, some of the sectional heads from Southern Anambra and Irno displaced by these appointments were transferred sometimes outside the company in total contradiction of the company's condition of service (Udo:2012).

Administratively, it was reasoned that even if Engr. Iiodibia was to be relieved of his appointment, the post should have been given to Engr. G.C. Nwali, the next in rank to Engr. Iiodibia, and not to an outsider. All these appeals to reason, legality and conscience made by the senior staff of the company were disregarded by the governor. He turned down all appeals and proceeded to impose Engr.Adibe on the company. With Engr. Adibe securely imposed, as the general manager, corruption gained a foothold in the company. The imposed GM embarked on incessant suspensions and termination of appointments of the employees of the company especially those opposed to his appointment. The company's board of Directors under the then chairmanship of R. B.K. Okafor was rendered lame and ineffective.

At the same time, judicial inquiries set up and tasked to proffer solution to the problems afflicting the company was not allowed to see the light of the day. The body was not given the room to investigate and expose misrule and maladministration in the company. The crisis in the company was so much that the workers embarked on series of demonstration against it. Before long, employees of the company including those with specialist skills started resigning having become disenchanted with the way the company was being run.

The Imo State Governor Chief Sam Mbakwe convinced by the perceived good intention of Governor Nwobodo did nothing to prevent the collapse of the company (Egwu:2012). The result of many years of crisis in the company was the closure of the factory and the sacking of the General Manager, Engr. Adibe. The company was closed at a time its product was in high demand. Much of the heavy machinery of the factory was mishandled and destroyed by unprofessional recruited by the Nwobodo administration to operate the factory during the many months of the industrial action. The closure of the company was a loss not only in terms of revenue to the state, but also to the nation as a whole. Governor Nwobodo responding to a question on the reasons for the closure of the company was quoted as saying:

The closure was the only solution to the problems of the factory at the time. The affairs of the factory were then becoming over politicized, coupled with the staggering deficit of about N32 million which the company owed its customers and other financial institutions (Anyaeji, 1982:17)

The two crucial questions which the Governor failed to address were what and who were responsible for the monumental debt of N32 million in this once viable premier industry in the south east? Many have also asked what the Anambra State House of Assembly did in finding out why there was such debt and liabilities. The silence of the State Assembly was what perhaps compelled Ndubusi to assert that, "corruption in the State was practiced by both arms of government- the executive and the legislative under mutual understanding" , (Ndubusi, *Expose corruption, inefficiency or waste in the execution or administration of laws within its legislative competence and in the disbursement or administration of funds appropriated by it. (1979 Constitution of Nigeria)* 1991:20). To many, it was one of an informal agreement between the State executive, the party (NPP).

The Impact on the Premier Breweries Onitsha

The premier Breweries Onitsha was another State industry that was badly hit by maladministration during the Jim Nwobodo's regime. Immediately Jim Nwobodo was sworn in as the Chief Executive of Anambra State, he assiduously worked towards taking control of the affairs of the Premier Breweries, producers of the popular Premier Beer. Before Nwobodo came into office, Premier Beer was widely held as one of the made in Nigeria beers of the highest quality. It was highly consumed all over the southeast and beyond, (Nwankwo: 1982:24).

With the coming of Nwobodo's administration, corruption and mismanagement gradually crept into the company. Many link the collapse of the company to the policies of his government. His government and the party (NNP) use the proceeds from the sales of the products to boost its finances (Ugwu:2012). Before long, the quality of the beer began to drop. Its consumers became hesitant to take it or recommend it to friends (Nwankwo, 1992:24). Career progression in the company and promotion were now determined by other measures short of merit and hard work. Workers morale dropped resulting in the poor attitude to work. Like the cement company, the Nwobodo administration was running it as a private financial enterprise for his government and party rather than as a limited liability company.

In this instance, the level of corruption was so pervasive that a member of the State House of Assembly was forced to invoke its constitutional oversight functions to probe the affairs of the company under section 120 (2) (b) of the 1979 Constitution which mandated it to:

The motion was regrettably killed by the same forces behind it by a vote of 33 in favor and 45 against. According to Hon. Emehelu, a then member of the House, he voted against the motion because the sponsors of the bill wanted to remove or impeach the Chief Executive rather than inquiring into the affairs of the company (Ndubisi, 1991:45). The statement of Hon. Emehelu appears very insightful and informative. It goes a long way to show that the legislature, and by extension, government was deeply involved in the crisis bedeviling the company.

It was then alleged that almost all the legislators who voted against the motion were bribed to do so. In this category were the legislators whose wives, brothers, uncles, cousins etc were corruptly receiving consignments of beer from the factory as sanctioned by the office of his Excellency (Ndubisi, 1991:20).

Corruption being contagious by nature was to sooner than later, spread to the rank and file in the company. The company was known for its over inflated contracts and supplies bills. Industrial raw materials purchased were no longer determined by utility and profitability, but rather by volume of spoils that the official would realize from the deal etc. Failure to give bribe to the ranks and file could lead to loss of files and requisitions of customers and endless delay in the loading of customer's consignment.

The fall in the beer's quality was the final straw that broke the company's back. As many people became reluctant to consume the beer, its production was forced to drop. Compulsorily, its staff was downsized. Many employees of the company were disengaged or laid off.

While the administration of Nwobodo heralded the collapse and closure of many viable and flourishing State owned companies and corporations, no new ones were established in the State (Ndubisi 1991:27). The governor announced to the people of Anambra State that he closed both the Nkalagu Cement Industry and the Niger Steel Company of Emene due to over-politicization. Available evidence suggests that maladministration was rather responsible for the collapse of these industries.

These were industries and corporations that employed Anambra State indigenes in their thousands. Following the closure, over 4000 employees of the establishment lost their jobs (National Concord May 2, 1982:11). These were industries that were meant to yield revenue to the government and people of the state; industries established by the previous administration that were operating profitably and optimally.

While some of the governors would run to the Federal Government begging for financial assistance, the case of Jim Nwobodo was complicated in that he was not in the good books of the Central Government. He allowed himself to be used by the opposition politicians in their confrontation with the Federal Government (Nwankwo, 1981:51). His actions were a tragedy to the State because he could not muster the needed courage to seek Federal Government's assistance to revive the collapsed industries. As a last report, these State owned industries and corporations resorted to borrowing from the banks and the capital market with the State Government standing as guarantor.

The collapse of these state industries left the economy of the state in total chaos. By 1981, the total external loan of the state stood at N171, 270, 070, a colossal sum at the time (Weekly Trumpet, May 1981:7). Nwankwo alludes that the loans so procured were mostly shared among the officials of the government.

As should be expected, unemployment level in the State became on the rise with no new industry to absorb fresh graduates and others thrown out of work. Thousands of unemployed youths migrated to other states to seek for employment. Government turned to foreign experts to revive its industry. 'Experts' were hired to run the Nkalagu Cement Factory and the presidential Hotel at Enugu. Why his administration sought the said foreign help and partnership in the management of companies in the state was baffling. This is because Anambra State then had highly specialized and competent men and women in all the areas. Many were of the opinion that the Governor hired the so-called experts to help him launder corrupt funds from the treasury of the State (Ndubisi 1991:32). As Arthur posits, government was merely colluding with these foreign economic mercenaries to embezzle the state funds (Arthur 1982:61).

Cecil Goz must be thinking of events in Anambra State at the time when he cautioned that any responsible person in Nigeria who keeps silent over the situation in the country was wicked. His words:

It is, therefore, in the interest of our highly esteemed citizens to speak out now and help correct things or hold their peace forever. If they air their views, and head-strong tyrants in the saddle refuse to adopt their recipes, well and good. But they shall have cleared themselves in the hands of posterity. For there is the saying that the hearing and not heeding danger signals remain an undoing of the child, but seeing danger and failing to send out warning notes remain the undoing of the old folks. So now is the time to "Ring the Alarm Bell", if the senior citizens of this country are not to be caught out at the hour of reckoning. For it is better to speak out and be damned than selfishly keep quiet and watch things go from bad to worse because "Silence" cannot eternally remain golden even in the face of a disaster. (Sunday Satellite, October 14, 1982:16) Perhaps in response to Cecil Goz's admonition, patriotic Anambra State citizens did not keep quiet.

They kept reminding the government time and again of its short comings, but the governor seemed not to have heeded their warnings (Ndubisi, 1991:18).

Jim Nwobodo's leadership style did not spare the education sector either. The state's education sector was confronted with mind boggling stories. A report in the Weekly Trumpet averred that:

Principals of some female post-primary institutions in Anambra State have been instructed to dispatch about 20 of their students each to the Government House Enugu for a gala night. The event is one of the highlights marking the 42nd birthday anniversary of Governor Jim coming up today. Letters to this effect were surreptitiously sent to the schools' heads from the public relations unity of the State Ministry of Social Development, Youths and Culture. (Weekly Trumpet, May 9, 1982:11).

Prior to this, good meaning citizens of Anambra State were shocked in 1981 when it was reported that the principal of Girls' Secondary School, Ozubulu was forced to send some of her college students for an all night party during the Governor's visit to the town. The letter mandating their attendance to the party made unambiguously clear that the girls would not be back to school the same night (National Concord, Friday, Nov, 13, 1981:3). This act of the government was likely to expose the girls to serious moral problems.

As stated by an affected citizen of the State on this issue: As parents toiling for the welfare of my young daughter and no less worried about her physical and moral safety, the exposure of some hundreds of Teenage schools girls to such evening orgies deceptively christened "Birth day gala night" makes the moral responsibility of both the State Executive and those willing heads of females post-primary a matter for deep concern. (Weekly Trumpet, May 9, 1982:6).

In other climes, John Profumo as member of the British Parliament and Minister of State, resigned his appointment as British Minister of State because he was associated with a street girl, Christine Keller. All over the world, it is morally and ethically wrong for government officials to be identified with street or chore girls. In the case of Nigeria and Anambra State to be particular, officials of the government of the state driven by ulterior motives gave no qualms seducing girls at public expense, and carry on as if they did not cross any moral or ethical line as expected of them. As was opined by many, the millions of naira approved for the administration's extravaganza was enough to set up industries in the State for the employment of the youths.

In summation, the administration of Governor Jim Nwobodo wantonly violated the fundamental objectives and directive principles of State policy as set out by the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which provides inter alia:

The state shall direct its policy towards ensuring ...that the material resources of the community are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good, the economic system is not operated in such a way as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group, and that adequate and suitable shelter; minimum wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment and sick benefits are provided for all citizens. (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: 1979:9)

The resultant effects were that the state witnessed an increased wave industrial conflict, armed robbery and other sundry crimes.

CONCLUSION

We have thus far, been examining the policies of Jim Nwobodo and how it impacted on state owned corporations and industries. We have also examined the twin evils of favoritism and nepotism which unfortunately, were the hallmark of the Nwobodo administration. It is revealed that these twin evils impacted negatively on the state industries and corporations during his administration between 1979 and

1983. As was revealed further, the twin maladies in the period under review were to result in social tensions and conflicts between the generality of the people and workers on one side, and his administration on the other. The apparent consequences were that the state suffered from an increased wave of untold criminality, armed robbery together with other sundry crimes.

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