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Opinion : I Beg Your Pardon, Mr. Senate President

Posted by [admin](#) on 2007/10/8 10:39:29 (332 reads)

By Femi Taiwo

I was privileged to listen to the angry response of Phillip Umeadi, the spokesperson for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to the indictment, by the European Union Election Observers' group that monitored the last elections in Nigeria, of the entire Nigerian state and its minion, INEC. The foreign observers, as is now well known, did not mince words in their condemnation of what passed for elections in Nigeria, last April.

They concluded that not only were the elections not free and fair; in many constituencies, no elections at all took place. Rather than a measured response to the report that sought to identify and isolate the problem areas and promises to investigate the merits or lack thereof of some of the charges made by the observers, Umeadi deployed the standard dodge of public servants in Nigeria. The dodge is well known and widely deployed: every time someone points out that the steering of the ship of state might be defective, our stewards assume the mantle of the only people who have the interest of the state at heart, the only ones who are patriotic and who alone can safeguard the polity from disintegrating. What is more, the rest of us are supposed to line up behind them and say "Amen". It is bad enough when those who indict the state are fellow citizens; it is considered unacceptable in the extreme when foreigners issue the indictment.

Phillip Umeadi, in his God-like omniscience, divined immediately that the report and the indictment it contained were "a deliberate attempt to incite Nigerians". Needless to say, it does not occur to Mr. Umeadi that those whom we invited to help provide an impartial umpire in assessing the fairness of our elections could have no interest in fomenting unrest in Nigeria in their aftermath. Additionally, these are

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observers from different countries and motley walks of life. One would have to have an unreasoning enthusiasm for conspiracy theories to not only share the belief exemplified by Umeadi but also to declare the presence of "a deliberate attempt".

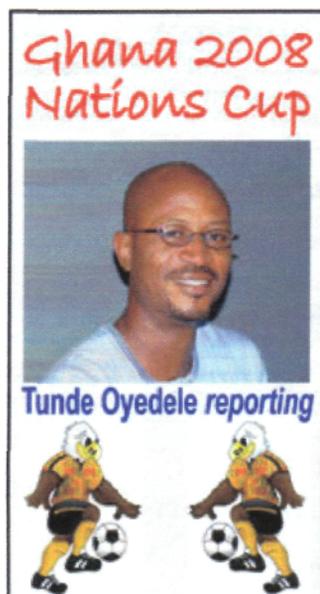
If Umeadi's response is ludicrous, that of David Mark, the Senate President, is remarkable for its unawareness of the irony in his stance. I cannot claim to report Mark's remarks verbatim but he said something to the following effect: He admonished the observers for not realising that when one brings to Nigeria a template forged in Europe and one tries to map a Nigerian element onto that template, "it won't transfer here. They (the observers) must understand that things are different here." Incredible! Everything about David Mark's response reeks of irony. It is amazing that this is completely lost on our Senate President.

Where does one begin? The country of which Mark is Senate President is the product of an externally-derived template right down to its name. Maybe the idea of Nigeria has not transferred well and that is why the country is in such a sorry state. But I have never heard Mark say anything about this. The army in which Mark served his career is similarly derived and continues to derive its inspiration for its institutions, values, and practices from the same foreign fount. After all, when last I looked, beyond import substitution, I don't see any effort at domesticating the Western template onto which our military is mapped. The Senate, a venerable institution in its birthplace, which he now serves as its President, is of foreign, specifically Western, provenance. Again, except we wish to count as evidence of its Nigerian adaptation its lack of responsiveness and accountability to those whom it serves, there can be no doubt that Mr. Mark does not have any difficulty serving this foreign-derived institution in his present capacity and enjoying the perquisites and prerogatives attached thereto. Finally, Senator David Mark has not, at least publicly, expressed any anxiety regarding the failure by his family to adapt the template of Christianity and the associated Western culture that it brought in its wake to a radically different Idoma reality. This explains why a man named David Mark who serves as the President of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria must be deemed bereft of a sense of irony that he would take umbrage at being told that the practices of a foreign-derived institution—presidential

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and National Assembly elections—in his country fall radically short of minimum standards of freedom, fairness and transparency that are the hallmarks of their careers in the lands whence they are derived.

There is a deeper issue at stake in the respective responses of Phillip Umeadi and David Mark. Were it not tragic, one would be amazed at the selective embrace of things Western by the likes of Umeadi and Mark. Senator Mark and his cohort in the National Assembly never seem to have any difficulty going on junkets to the United States at the slightest opportunity, both official and personal. It is a fact that many in their class purchase property and generally stash their wealth in those places, in part, because those places have got a good handle on things like elections and good government. And when the Marks and the Umeadis do so, they do not evince any anxiety about the provenance of the templates on which their lives are mapped. Indeed, there is little doubt that our leaders race to Western centres not because of the creature comforts that such places provide—those with means can buy those comforts for themselves in Nigeria—they do so because the conditions in them enhance their capacity for self-governance, control over their lives and respect for their personal spaces which are all products of elected governments that are based on and derive their legitimacy from the will of the people freely and truly, not dubiously, expressed in fair and transparent elections. What is particularly galling is that the Marks and Umeadis of this world think only they and not the ordinary people of this country deserve the benefits that their wealth secure for them in form of access to the lands whence came the observers who have the temerity to insist that *ordinary Nigerians deserve better*.

My final word to Umeadi, Mark, and their ilk is this. No one can destabilise or cause unrest in Nigeria or incite Nigerians without the active connivance of Nigerians. The worm that destroys the kolanut inheres in it. Nor is it the case that the reason that the April so-called elections went so badly is that there is a disjuncture between the template on which they are based and the reality in which they unfolded. Not at all. The elections went awry because those who ran them are less desirous of making the template work for ordinary Nigerians as it has worked for them repeatedly across their lives and careers as we pointed out above in our consideration of Mark's response. I beg your pardon, Mr. Senate

President, what do you mean "the template won't transfer here"? It is only that people like you do not want to see it transfer.

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