

## Praetorianism the Public Service: Analysis of the Impact and Consequences of Military Rule on Public Administration in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact and consequences of military rule on the Public Service in Nigeria, as well as the major challenges that confront this principal administrative machinery of government in its drive to adjust itself to the demands of true democracy and good governance in Nigeria. This is done with a view to highlighting areas of emphasis in the on-going efforts at reform of the Public Service, and to make relevant recommendations towards making it more focused and adaptable to the needs of a truly democratic dispensation. Making use of library research methodology, the paper examined the impact and consequences of Military praetorianism upon the Public Service in Nigeria, especially as it relates to contemporary issues and challenges faced by the Nigerian Public Service. Listing viable alternative futures, the paper proffered new possibilities and solutions for re-positioning the Public Service, and urged Public Servants to rise up to the challenge of new innovations, and a new approach made mandatory by the imperatives of a new democratic order in the Country. The paper concluded that in this age of reforms the Public Service must accept the challenge of re-inventing itself and return to its pride of place. To do this the civil servant must shed the toga of civil master and rededicate itself to an irreversible return to the “tap” instead of aiming for the “top”.

**Key words:** Praetorianism; Bureaucracy; Military Rule; Administration; Public Service; Socialisation; Whitehallism

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### INTRODUCTION

By January 15, 1966, the combined consequences of the failure of the Nigerian political class to resolve the contradictions arising out of corruption among party members and government functionaries, intensive inter-elite struggles, inefficiency, maladministration and incompetence in the management of Public affairs, among other things had precipitated a military *coup d’etat*. The immediate imperative of a military coup d’etat however is the suspension of the constitution, the disbandment of political structures and the political class and a rule by decrees, and military fiats (Amuwo,1998).

However, the palpable ignorance and administrative incompetence of soldiers to govern the affairs of civil society necessitated the development of a power vacuum in the immediate post-coup days. This inevitable vacuum was an alluring invitation to the administrative elite who did not hesitate to seize the initiative to take over the reins of administrative, and technically also political power. Thus there inevitably arose a union and a congruence of interests between the administrative elite and the new political leaders in uniform in a typically Michelian perspective. It was therefore no surprise that the military and administrative elites should form a coherent union for the protection of their common interests. For, according to First (1970, p.114).

The civil service does not act directly to seize power. But once the military does it, it is the civil service that cossets the new regime in its shaky first hours and make sure it survives.

And as Aristide Zolberg further noted

Civil Servants cannot act directly to seize state power; at best they can create conditions... that provide opportunities for take-over by the Military which shares their class interests. (Zolberg, 1973, p, 25).

Zolberg's observations (above) may have been vindicated by the fact that since January 1966 there has been several more coups and counter-coups in Nigeria, from the overthrow of Aguiyi Ironsi in 1967 to the sacking of the Shonekan interim government by Sani Abacha in 1993. In all of these the Nigerian Civil Service had played key roles either in support of an existing military junta or in the provision of an enabling environment or conditions for the coming of a new regime. Olaley (2005) has also observed that

The Civil bureaucrats turned political technocrats were co-opted as partners with the military and both exercised the fused powers of the executive and the legislative segments of government. In other words civilian bureaucrats participated in sustaining aberrant regimes as opposed to democratically constituted governments....

This could not also but have a significant and lasting impact upon the machinery of the Public Service itself. The implications of this for the loyalty and commitment as well as the efficiency and competence of the Civil Service in an era of civil rule and democratic consolidation needs no elaboration. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the impact and consequences of military rule on the Public Service in Nigeria, as well as the major challenges that confront this principal administrative machinery of government in its drive to adjust itself to the demands of true democracy and good governance in the beleaguered country. This is done with a view to highlighting areas of emphasis in the on-going efforts at reform of the Civil Service, and to make relevant recommendations towards making it more focused and adaptable to the needs of a truly democratic dispensation.

## 1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Whitehallism:** As used in this paper, Whitehallism refers to the underlying philosophy behind the British system of Public Administration (Whitehall), under a Parliamentary System of Government peculiar to Great Britain. The System of Public Administration practiced in Nigeria was a British Colonial imposition patterned after the Whitehall blueprint and was basically designed to maintain and sustain the Parliamentary political superstructure bequeathed to Nigeria at independence by the British.

**Praetorianism:** This is an invidious socio-political imposition upon sundry political systems in the developing world, by colonial rule. Praetorian rule meant that the formal agencies transferred to African hands at independence were alien in derivation, functionally conceived, bureaucratically designed, authoritarian in content and orientation, and primarily concerned with

issues of domination rather than legitimacy. During decolonization, these patterns were in most cases elaborated and consolidated rather than transformed. This was one of the most invidious effects of colonial rule upon the people of Nigeria, as it constituted the origin of the abiding conflict between the Nigerian political and administrative elite, and the subjugated masses of their people. Hence Dudley (1973) commented that; "It is one of the seeming paradoxes of colonialism that a people have first to be subjugated in order to have political power transferred to them."

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Our preferred framework for analysis of this problematique is the elite theory. The models which have come to be subsumed under the classical elite theses are; the organizational approaches of Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, the psychological thesis of Vilfredo Pareto, the economic approach of Burnham and the Institutional model of C. Wright Mills. For the purpose of this paper we shall adopt the positions of Mosca, Michels and Mills. According to Mosca (1939):

In all societies... two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class always the less numerous, perform all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first in a manner that is, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first in appearance at least, with the material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organization. (Quoted in Parry, 1969, p.17).

In the view of Mosca, the main strength of the elite in his ability to rule the mass lies in its capacity to organize. The minority has the advantage in being a minority; a small cohesive, highly communicative and maneuverable unit, which on account of its small size can most easily reach decisions, having a sharper focus and power of analysis, communicate the decisions to one another and act upon it in a relatively short time. The fact of organization however offers better opportunity for flexibility and quick response to change in circumstances. Thus the minority though inferior to the mass in number, remain stronger and more effective in any circumstances against the individual units in the majority. The minority when organized and focused would be truly irresistible and invincible. Mosca refers to this minority elite as the "political class" which for Mosca is sub-divided into a higher and a lower stratum.

In Robert Michel's paradigm, the success of the elite also depends on effective organization, and the fact of organization gives rise inevitably to an elite. This is the basis of Robert Michel's celebrated Iron Law of Oligarchy. According to this Law, the nature of organization of any

size is such that it gives power and advantage to the group of leaders who cannot then be checked and accountable by their followers (Parry, 1969). In time the leaders begin to think more of their personal survival than of the organization itself.

Eventually the goals of the organization give way to the need of the elite who run the organization. Thus the initial goals of the organization are displaced, and the organization becomes merely an instrument for the pursuit of the personal interests of the ruling elite, who then emerge as a self-serving oligarchy. Therefore Michel argued; "who says organization says oligarchy". This conclusion has come to be celebrated on account of its universality and resilience as the Iron Law of Oligarchy.

For both Mosca and Michel therefore, elitism is the hand maiden of organization wherever a human collectivity exists, organization is inevitable, and who says organization, says oligarchy. C. Wright Mills however sees the power of the elite as being attached to a wider set of prevailing institutions such as the military, the big corporations and the political executive. For Mills, power is institutionalized in society and the elite are a product of the institutional landscape of the society. As modern society exhibits certain strategic and key institutions, the uppermost ranks in these institutions constitute the command posts of the social structure (Mills, 1954, p.4). The elite then consist or is composed of those who hold the leading positions in the strategic hierarchies (Parry, 1969).

If these hierarchies are scattered and disjointed, then their respective elites tend to be scattered and disjointed. If they have many interconnections and points of coinciding interests, then their elites tend to form a coherent kind of grouping. In the view of Mills, for a national power elite to exist, there must be some contact between the leaders of the hierarchies. Such contact may range from conscious conspiracy to consensus amongst the leaders as to policies and values. This institutional proximity is at its strongest where individuals interchange commanding roles at the top of one dominant institutional order with those in another (Mills, 1959, p.288).

Criticizing the elite theory, Robert Dahl and Nelson Polsby argued that the elite could only be identified in a society where there are openly articulated differences of opinion. It would be impossible to discover the elite where there is consensus in the society. Besides, it was not clearly stated by the elite theorists, the people over whom power is being wielded and in what decision areas it is being exercised.

In spite of these criticisms however, the elite theses continue to find general acceptability and applicability to a wide range of problems in socio-political relations in society. The criticisms of the opponents of elitism are still too superficial to vitiate or belie the assumptions that form the basic pillars of the elite theses. To this extent therefore the elite theses must be regarded as scientifically valid

and useful for further up building as a theory that focuses on the political processes in the development of society.

One thing however that cannot be in doubt is the overwhelming relevance of this theory to the development of public administration in Nigeria. One of the most invidious effects of military rule upon the Nigerian populace was the fact of a military praetorian socialization. It created within the masses a servile mentality. This showed itself in unconditional obedience to political authority and its established institutions of power, leading ultimately to a systematic emasculation of civil society and a politically docile populace (Dudley, 1973). And within the nouveau political elites to whom power was transferred via severely manipulated elections, it generated a conception of leadership roles in personal and authoritative terms.

Through coercion when expedient and deceit when possible, the elites have continued to manipulate the people, the economy and state power in the name of democracy...the autocratic and regimented nature of the various military regimes became an albatross to democracy (Agagu, 2005).

For the implementation for all of these, the Nigerian Public Service elites were the interested mediators as well as the principal accomplices.

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### 3. THE NATURE OF MILITARY RULE

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Military rule occurs when soldiers seize control of a nation's political apparatus by force of arms, and govern the state by decrees and fiats. In a military regime the constitution is suspended and its provisions held in abeyance. It is an arbitrary rule, an aberration in which the state is appropriated by the very people who are trained and paid to protect it.

All the institutions of state come under the pressure of illogical and unpredictable and sometimes unpopular rule, in the forceful consummation of a government by intimidation. It is an authoritarian and personalist system of rulership that brooks no opposition or tolerate contrary political views and opinions. Military rule is a zero-sum political equation which regards the need to emasculate all dissenting opinions and disable or disempower all social forces perceived as capable of asserting an autonomous existence as a desideratum of sorts. Military rule is a non-accommodationist politics of pattern maintenance which tries to obliterate the political space altogether while denying the people the right to citizenship, as routine coercion is employed to exact from the people, their duties and obligations towards the state (Amuwo, 1998). There are however certain basic features that are associated with military administration of civil populations.

First is the fact that the military organizational structure is characterized by a unity of command, a hierarchy of authority and *esprit de corps*. It is a commandist proforma organizational arrangement that is oriented towards order rather than freedom and

innovation (Amuwo, 1998). Second, is the military's disdain for due process in administration, preferring, instead, the quick-fix solution to administrative problems. According to Kolawole (1998), Nigerian military leaders could not draw a line of difference between public funds and private funds.

Amuwo (1998) also argued that one of the characteristics of military rule in Nigeria was a politics of prebendalism or neo-patrimonialism, in a rapacious and authoritarian perspective. This lack of accountability as a feature of military rule, is at the same time the recipe for corruption. This is why Daloz and Heo (1997, pp.361-376) argued that: By routinising corruption and exacerbating a monolithic political culture, the military perpetuates by design or by default, an aberrant political culture that hegemonises the military while enslaving civil and political societies.

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#### 4. THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

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The whitehall model of public administration which was a colonial bequest to Nigeria was founded upon cherished British traditions and values of patriotism, confidence, honour, trust and self-reliance (Agagu, 2004, p.137). Whitehallism as a public administration doctrinaire perceives administration as a product of civilization, with efficiency and economy within a framework of political neutrality, as its hallmarks. Although the whitehall model is scientific in orientation, it nevertheless remained ethical and moralistic in content.

First, is the notion that public administration should serve as a means of attracting a higher form of society. And within this context provide basic services to the community by supplying the public with quality goods and services at affordable cost and by stimulating the social and educational organizations in the society (Agagu, 2004, p.139). The goal of administration under this system being both a matter of science and ethics does assume a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature, even if very often this is hindered by the concomitant and largely unavoidable problem of bureaucracy. Its basic features remained that of impartiality, neutrality and anonymity in the discharge of its duties towards the state and society. Top civil servants are therefore rarely to be seen, never heard and are expected to keep sealed lips in public. The civil servant is expected to be always on tap and never on top. This means that the public servant is, under this model expected to be the instruments and not the masters of policy.

This according to Bailey (1980, p.442), this implies a call to serve a larger public, which in turn evokes a degree of selflessness and nobility on the part of the Public Servant. This capacity of the public servant to transcend, sublimate and to transform narrowly vested

compulsions lies not only at the heart of all civilized morality but also constitute the fulcrum around which public administration revolves.

The traditional roles of public servants have been grouped into three basic categories. According to Olaley (2005) They are

- To advise on policy formulation
- To implement policy decisions
- To influence the direction of policy.

Other functions would include the maintenance of government and be the custodian of civil knowledge expertise (Olaley, 2005, p.157)

In summary therefore, the traditional responsibilities and role of the public service in Nigeria may be seen generally as the formulation and implementation of approved programmes aimed at improving the welfare of the citizen through provision of various goods and services such as education, healthcare delivery, agriculture, industry, social infrastructure, sports and to so much else as needed to facilitate socio-political and economic development. (Olaley, 2004, p.159)

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#### 5. NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE UNDER MILITARY RULE

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Having overthrown the politicians it was quite obvious even to the military themselves that they cannot govern the country alone. For apart from the fact of their technical incompetence to do this, the sheer size of the country and the meagre personnel strength of the military in 1966 made an attempt at direct administration by the military a difficult proposition. Thus given the strength of the bureaucrats and the weaknesses of the military elite, it was inevitable that the military elite would need the resources of their civilian opposite number, and the police to govern the country. (Gboyega and Abubakar 1989;30).

And thus the alliance which the military had to forge with the bureaucratic elite was only natural, and an unavoidable necessity, and indeed, the top bureaucrats and the military elite legitimised one another; as the military legitimized the bureaucracy (Ibid). What is even more noteworthy here is the fact that unlike what obtained during the civilian regime when the higher public service was part of the ruling class, with the new military rulers, power seemed to have been concentrated in the hands of the bureaucratic elite, senior civil administrators played the principal role in policy formulation and indeed played significant political roles, the appointment of federal and state commissioners notwithstanding. (Gboyega & Abubakar, 1989).

This power-political role of the bureaucrat in the military era, was due partly to the technical deficiencies of the military elite in the sphere of public administration. And also partly to the political crises of 1966–1967, and the civil war which did not end until 1970. But even



more importantly, it was due to the role perception of the bureaucrats themselves. For according to C.O. Lawson (Secretary to the Federal Military Government and Head of Service 1972-1975).

There is no difference between the role of a civil servant in a civilian regime and his role in a military regime. In both regimes, he is expected to play a leading part in the formulation and the execution of government policy... The other important factor is that because of the welcome pre-occupation of the military leadership with social and economic development rather than political activities, the civil servant now finds an unprecedented opportunity for creative activity. This necessarily, at the expense of that of the Commissioner. (Lawson, 1973, 11 & 12).

In essence therefore, Nigeria under the military became more of an administered rather than a political society (Lawson, 1973). According to Alex Gboyega and Abubakar (1989, p.31).

Although the civil service had no institutionalized role in the SMC and the FEC, the Head of the FMG could, and did in fact delegate executive and statutory powers to the permanent Secretaries to make sub-ordinate legislation. Permanent Secretaries and other senior officials attended cabinet meetings and participated in the discussions, although decisions more often than not were made by the "political heads", namely, the commissioners and top officers of the armed forces including the police.

When after 1975, and specifically during the Murtala Mohammed regime, bureaucrats were stopped from attending cabinet meetings, this made little difference to the ascendancy of the bureaucrats in the political power terrain in Nigeria. As in many instances, senior administrators could still be seen not only making public statements, but also explaining to the public, the implications of government policy. Thus the policy advocacy roles of the administrative elite among other things were very difficult to reconcile with the impartiality, neutrality and anonymity roles of the civil service that was the legacy and heritage of white hall. According to which model, top civil servants were rarely to be seen, never heard, they were expected to keep sealed lips in public. They were not supposed to explain to the public, government policy decisions taken on the basis of their advice. This was the job of the minister. The military situation thus undermined and ultimately betrayed the myth of civil service anonymity (Gboyega & Abubakar, 1989).

This is why Gboyega and Abubakar (1989) concluded that, "the coming of the military into the political scene brought to the fore a "New Despotism" of faceless mandarins who were not responsible or accountable to anyone but themselves".

All through the various military regimes, top civil servants as an elite group did not only consolidate their power and influence over decisions of government, but also extended this to an unprecedented level. Top bureaucrats found themselves running public corporations

and state-owned companies as either chairmen or board members or even sole administrators of local governments, (and in some cases) in addition to running their ministries. As sole administrators of local governments, their roles were directly and undisguisedly political.

Consequently, and unlike during the civil regime, and owing substantially to the complete absence of public accountability, bureaucratic sole administrators, and senior officials in different capacities and quasi-political roles, became, not only men of political power and influence, but also men of substantial economic means and financial muscle. Hence in connection with bureaucrats in this era, Gboyega and Abubakar (1989) argued that

Economically, they were and are a highly privileged group in a country where some seventy-five percent of the population live below subsistence level. As Chairman and members of boards of directors of public corporations, senior officials wielded much more economic and political power than they did during the civil regime. Obviously they were part of the ruling class participating in making important political decisions.

Military rule thus not only undermined the basis of political neutrality in the Nigerian public service, it destroyed completely the socio-economic innocence of the public servant and transformed him into an interested competitor, not only for political office but also for economic power with the people he was employed to serve. And in relation to the masses of the people, bureaucratic high handedness, corruption, abuse of office and a "settlement" culture became the main feature of the civil servant who has suddenly become "civil master" over the people whose socio-economic and political interests he was hired to protect.

By 1975, the general dissatisfaction with, and loss of confidence in the public services by the citizenry had reached its zenith. Exasperated by the depth of corruption and ineptitude in the public service and the consequent loss of effectiveness of the machinery for self-correction, the Murtala Mohammed administration carried out a sweeping purge on the public service. This was done with a view to ridding the service of bureaucratic deadwoods, the invalid, the corrupt, the indolent and those of declining productivity, as well as the incompetent. (Gboyega & Abubakar, 1989, p.6).

The effect of this purge upon the morale of civil servants and upon the public service in general has been the subject of intense debate. The fact however remains that the purge deflated considerably the hitherto over bloated ego of the bureaucratic elite and reduced the tendency towards abuse of office and highhandedness. But the purge also had the negative effect of undermining bureaucratic confidence and weakening the internal devices for moral restraint in the machinery of government, paving the way for a mindless pillage of the nation's economy by selfish and greedy politicians especially during the newer era of Presidential democracy in Nigeria, between 1979 and 1983.

The massive retrenchment of public servants in 1984–85 was as much dictated by economic necessity as by a mood of vengeance against all facets of the Public Service that had let the country down. There was the general belief that Nigerian public administration had proved impervious to all remedies applied to cure it of its deficiencies. The purge that followed affected much of the guilty, but inevitably also a number of the blameless, who became victims either of the malice of their fellow bureaucrats or of genuine error.

In addition, the public services came under severe, and sustained morale-sapping public criticism also for their role during the second republic. The technical competence of the Public Service had already been presumed and where their performance had failed to be satisfactory, it was assumed as being due to willful negligence, corruption or ineffective political direction and control. By 1985, the status of the Public Service as an efficient, neutral instrument had been brought to question (Gboyega & Abubakar, 1989).

With the advent of the military, praetorianism wore a new and perhaps more vicious face, and the resultant military discipline in a commandist perspective, did much to curb the free run of the bureaucrats. It also brought into government, ministers and commissioners who were academics from the Ivory towers, and thus radically improved the quality of governance.

The improvement in the quality of ministers that military praetorianism engendered was due also to the fact that, the highly educated incumbents recognized that they had been chosen from a sea of equally capable alternatives, and therefore were eager to impress. They were also not really involved in politicking, and were therefore not subject to the pressures to which prebendal politics exposed the politicians. Before 1966, therefore Nigerian politicians could really not be regarded as masters of policy, and were not only inefficient but very incompetent as holders of political portfolios. During this period, the conventional cannon of public service morality that the public servant must be “on tap and not on top” was stood on its head.

Although throughout the period of military rule in Nigeria, scant efforts was directed towards spelling out new political or administrative doctrines, the idea of a career civil service with its mandatory canons of impartiality neutrality and anonymity survived – at least in principle. It is also true that although the basic philosophy of a White hall model of public administration remained in place, the lack of active political structures engendered by military ban on political activities, created a yawning policy vacuum which the bureaucratic elite eagerly filled.

For a significant period, at the onset of military rule in Nigeria, higher civil servants who constitute the national bureaucratic elite, actually governed in a diarchy with military politicians, and between 1970 and 1975, the bureaucratic elite at the Federal level did actually

achieve something close to primacy in the policy process. (Adamolekun, 1998, p.163). Military praetorianism not only encouraged the dominance of “administocracy”, institutionalized by the colonial variant of a local whitehallism which the Nigerian public administration represented, but actually in its own way entrenched it out of sheer necessity.

In addition, the military’s abiding disregard for established civil service rules, as exemplified by the 1985/76 civil service purge among other things, damaged severely the self-confidence and sense of independence of the leadership of the civil service, and lowered the morale of the rank and file (Adamolekun, 1998). This fact is in itself an introduction of important changes in the existing relationship between politics and administration in Nigeria.

But this did not in any way loosen the strangle-hold of the bureaucratic elite on the reins of political power, for according to Adamolekun (1998, p.163)

For the remaining years of military rule (1976 – 70 and 1975–79), the role of civil servants in the policy making process was only marginally different from what it had been under parliamentary rule. There were two lasting consequences of military rule for the country’s administrative system. First, there was the persistence of a political role for a small number of higher civil servants ... when the civil servants concerned were referred to as ‘Super Permanent Secretaries’... it is appropriate to refer to this category of civil servants as political technocrats, officers who apply their managerial and technical competence or expertise (technocracy) to political questions.

## 6. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The Nigerian Civil Service today consists of the Federal Civil Service and thirty-six autonomous State Civil Services, and the Federal Capital territory administrative machinery. The Federal and State Civil Services are organized around government departments or ministries and extra-ministerial departments headed by Ministers (Federal) and Commissioners (State), who are appointed by the President and the Governors respectively. These political heads are responsible for policy matters. The administrative heads of the ministries are the Permanent Secretaries. The chief Permanent Secretary is the Head of Service. There is also a Secretary to the Government who is a political appointee and the chief adviser to the government. He also conducts liaison between the government and the civil service. There is, in the presidency, a Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), an agency with the responsibility to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the public service reforms of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This bureau which is the secretariat of the steering committee on reforms (SCR) is chaired by the secretary to the government of the Federation as vice-chairman. The BPSR was set up

in the year 2004 to drive, co-ordinate and monitor the four components of the on-going reforms of the Federal Government as articulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). These include;

- Accelerated privatization and Liberalisation of the Economy
- Government reform and institutional strengthening.
- Public service reform including Public Expenditure and Budget Reforms.
- Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption Reforms

BPSR also collaborates with other organizations and institutions of government, Development partners and the private sector to articulate strategies and mechanisms for the implementation of public sector reform-related policies of the present government as articulated in the National Development Plan and the 7-point agenda of the Yar Adua administration.

From inception to date, no less than fourteen reforms have been carried out in the Public Service in Nigeria, from the Hunts reform commission of 1934 to the Ayida Reform Panel of 1994, and the Yar Adua reforms of 2009. Over this period and especially since independence the issues have remained fundamentally the same, revolving around the framework of foreign administrative imposition upon which a praetorian socialization was juxtaposed, throwing up a plethora of challenges and producing many-sided effects and distortions.

In summarizing the factors affecting the efficiency of the Nigerian Civil Service, Ajayi (1998) observed that over-staffing and the closely related poor remuneration of employees in the Public Service are key factors. Besides, there are the issues of poor assessment of manpower needs and the use of wrong criteria to appraise staff performance. For recruitment procedure, inadequate training and ineffective impression have been the natural imperatives of these. In addition, there tends to be a lack of qualified technical support staff as opposed to general staff. The failure to carry out periodic assessment of manpower needs of the various departments has led, not only to uneconomic systems of compensation, but also to inadequate job description and poor physical working conditions.

There has been considerable political interference in the process of personnel administration, leading to improper delegation of power, ineffective supervision and corruption. All of these have resulted in apathy, unauthorized and unreasonable absenteeism, lateness and idleness, with its attendant implications for inefficiency and general incompetence, rendering ineffective the general Public Service machinery. Adebayo (1992) had already pointed to the faulty recruitment processes which is riddled with favoritism, tribal sentiments, god-fatherism and the connection syndrome. Besides, there is the faculty and dishonest confidential reporting system resulting in the promotion of “dead woods” in the service.

In addition, the sacrifice of excellence and merit upon the altar of quota and ethnicity has failed to achieve the desired end of national unity and understanding through compromise. Instead, it has fanned the embers of resentment and ethnic hostility and even irredentist tendencies, especially in some areas of the South-South of Nigeria. President Yar Adua had in August 2009, decried what he called ethnicisation of politics and politicization of ethnicity, in obvious reference to the accusation in some quarters that the on-going civil service reforms were anti-North, and a promotion of Southern agenda (Golu, 2009).

But as far as Public Service reforms go, the Jerome Udoji reform commission of 1972 was seen as the first comprehensive administrative reform in the country, given its revolutionary provisions. Over a decade later however, the Dotun Phillips commission reported a number of lapses within the civil service, which included dangerously low staff morale and productivity, a lack of professionalism and scanty emphasis on results and concrete performance (Agagu, 2008). These observed lapses provoked the decree 43 of 1988 re-organisation which was aimed at increasing professionalism and attaining a better alignment of the civil service within the presidential system of government; greater decentralization and deregulation, effective combination of authority and responsibility, enhancement account, ability and effectiveness as well as improved operational speed and increased checks and balances. (Phillips, 1990) These however had the draw-back of leading to a politicization of the Civil Service through its top hierarchy.

The reversal of the 1988 reforms by the Ayida Panel of 1994 did not deny the deficiencies that the 1988 reforms set out to correct. Ayo (1998) also pointed out that in spite of the various civil service reforms, professionalism, adherence to a code of ethics and enhanced citizen participation have not helped the Nigerian case (Agagu, 2008). According to Adamolekun and Kiragu (2002), three major factors have driven the public administration reform efforts in Sub-Saharan African Countries since the early 1990s. They are; economic reform, democratization and the search for administrative efficiency, with a view to improving the quality of service delivery to the public. And as Agagu, 2008 has argued, the government had by May 1999, felt a compelling need to implant in the public service system, the ethical foundation and norms of good governance, with its associated virtues of transparency, accountability and due process. This, he observed was because of the pervasive corruption in all facets of Nigeria's public life, which made Transparency International rank Nigeria as one of the consistent top three most corrupt countries in the world.

The 1999 reforms under the auspices of NEEDS, had focused on privatization as the basic engine of economic growth. It had sought to reduce government direct involvement in enterprise development and management



through the empowerment of the private sector, with a view to reducing the financial burden of government and eliminate bureaucratic bottlenecks in the decision-making process. One important aspect of the Obasanjo reforms, Agagu (2008) pointed out, was the due process mechanism, which is a mechanism for ensuring strict compliance with the openness, competition and cost accuracy, rules and procedures that should guide the award of Federal Government contracts. Central to this process is the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU). It provided a good and efficient procurement system, installed good practices and reduced cost, ensuring value for money in the implementation of public works. In spite of these strong points of the Obasanjo reforms however, there are a number of unanticipated consequences that are no less debilitating to the welfare of the State.

Fundamentally, the reforms included mass retrenchment in the name of down-sizing or right-sizing, which went a long way to complicate the already debilitating problems of unemployment and extreme poverty. Besides, the reforms took essential services out of the reach of the common man, resulted in the removal of the principles of permanent tenure, and further demoralized and de-motivated the Public Service work force. In addition, it culminated in the disengagement of experienced hands.

Simply put therefore, the challenges that confront the Nigerian Public Service are, in spite of great efforts by successive regimes still legion. A Military praetorian socialization, juxtaposed upon a Whitehall Public Service model adapted to a Parliamentary political superstructure, in a Presidential democracy could hardly be more grotesque. In the words of Afirotan and Agagu (2008):

Here, it is a problem of socialization, of development, of learning and of orientation. Here it is a question of a Whitehall model that is peculiarly Nigerian, - not quite Whitehall and not quite anything else.

This, very succinctly describes the dilemma of the Nigerian Public Service, and the totally invidious and corrupting impact of praetorian socialization upon an otherwise strong and resilient administrative machinery.

## 7. ALTERNATIVE COURSES

Woodrow Wilson, one of the founding fathers of modern Public Administration once asked rather rhetorically: "what do we do to make Public administrators publicly virtuous?" (Wilson, 1887). Nearly two centuries later, the answer to this most fundamental question continues to "blow in the wind", at least in regard to contemporary Public Service processes and procedures in Nigeria. This issue seems also to have defied all previous therapeutic applications via a plethora of reforms, thirteen in all from 1934 to 1994. Hence Agagu (2008) poses the following questions inter alia:

How do the Public servants (in Nigeria) perceive the concept of public in line with service, public trust, impartiality, equality, transparency, accountability and honesty? At what point did the Public Service begin to suffer set-backs, and what role did the Civil Servants play in this set-back? What should be done to re-position the Civil Service and Civil Servants in terms creation of value, acquisition of skills, knowledge, and strategies in the various departments and units to bring about a re-positioning of the Nigerian Public Service?

Agagu (Ibid) argued that values in the Public sector should be vision based and accountability focused, together with a lean structure, an up mentality, excellence oriented and inclined towards service delivery. Adamolekun (2002) suggests the need for an agenda for action; a road map able to move the country's public institutions from their current mediocre performance, to a re-engineered and strongly improved performance capable of ensuring genuine poverty reduction, zero tolerance for corruption, quality service delivery and progress towards prosperity for all.

Adamolekun highlights several major and clearly identifiable points that should be relevant in any attempt to address these posers. First is the need to evolve a Nigerian Civil Service culture and tradition which is value-based, and which draws from universally acknowledged Public Service values, such as public trust, impartiality, equity, transparency, ethical standards and selflessness among others. Second is the necessity for the development and nurturing of Public Service leaders at all levels of government through innovative capacity building programmes.

Adebayo (1992, p.187) had also argued that no man could be justifiably blamed for not performing efficiently a job for which he was not trained. Training and refresher courses for public servants are indispensable for efficiency and development of new skills. The Nigerian Public Service urgently needs this, if only to meet the challenges of cyber technology, e-governance and the imperatives of globalization in a rapidly changing world. Allied to this is also the need to expose ministers and commissioners to orientation courses to prepare them adequately for their roles vis-à-vis the Public Service.

Third is the need for continuous adjustment of the mission and role of public institutions in line with the imperatives of democratic consolidation in a functioning market economy, a vibrant voluntary sector and a presidential democratic dispensation.

Fourth is the need for the introduction and implementation of public service inter-changes with the private sector, universities and non-governmental organizations to broaden the scope and exposure of Public Servants.

Fifth is the need for the Civil Society to play its role in demanding accountability in governance and quality service delivery in administration at all levels. Allied



with this is the need to effect renewal and strengthening of Public institutions through the creation of small well equipped permanent structures that will be responsible for periodic reforms to meet emerging changes in the system on an on-going basis. Such structures as the Bureau for Public Service Reforms (BPSR) is already a step in the right direction. According to Agagu (2008)

One of the ways of re-inventing the Public Sector is not only creating value in the course of their duties as Public Servants, but also by developing some skills and values of the citizenry. A public servant can make a farmer create new value in the way he or she approaches his or her farming. This applies to other areas of human endeavour. There are new areas to explore through new values such as tourism, sports, concept creation, taking initiatives to explore new areas or ventures.

Sixth is the need to combat corruption in the public service. The all-pervading nature of corruption in the service is a serious blight which may become decisive in frustrating all efforts at reform and re-positioning of the Public Service. The various anti-corruption institutions from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related offences Commission (ICPC) must be strengthened and adequately empowered by government to carry out their duties more effectively.

Finally, the general direction of Public Service activity needs some modification. The whole system is currently directed towards identifying faults and avoiding mistakes. This kind of orientation is counter-productive in a world of cyber technology and the high wired competition that is characteristic of the emerging trend of globalism. The result of this orientation is that Public Servants act too cautiously in a bid to avoid mistakes and prevent errors. In the final analysis, it boils down to a situation where the obsession with the search for and exposure of faults or errors creates an environment in which mistake-avoidance becomes regarded as the equivalent of success. This is also one of the consequences of a lack of clear focus, and an absence of a goal-oriented attitude in the public service.

This deficiency has been clearly identified and highlighted by Augustus Adebayo who in fact put it very succinctly, when he argued that

If the aspiration and goal of policy so clearly enunciated in the Udoji report on the Nigerian public service is to be achieved – a new style public service, a new conception of management provoking a more production or result-oriented approach – then the principles, process and procedure in public service should be radically overhauled so that public service will pivot on a positive success-seeking approach rather than the present mistake-avoiding approach. (Adebayo, 1992; 184).

If the need for a change in the current orientation in the direction enunciated by Adebayo was an urgent necessity by the turn of the last decade, it has become an immediate imperative in the new millennium. The Nigerian Public Service must rise up to this challenge or face the risk of becoming irrelevant in the modern world.

## CONCLUSION

There is no gain saying the fact that military praetorian rule has impacted rather severely and negatively on the traditional structure and functions of the Nigerian Public Service. Apart from institutionalizing a culture of impunity and scant respect for the needs of the citizenry, it has all but destroyed the traditional neutrality of the service, rendering it both partisan and corrupt. The rash of reforms that affected the service has done much to correct some of the problems, but even this has not gone far enough.

The imperatives of a new and functional civil service will oblige Public Servants to do some very serious re-thinking. A new orientation is required, to tap the skills, knowledge and experience which are replete in the civil service to open up new areas of relevance and benefit to the entire citizenry. To do this, the civil servant must shed the toga of civil master, and re-dedicate himself to an irreversible return to the “tap” instead of aiming for the top. The Public Service must however not move into oblivion. It has an abiding responsibility to generate new ideas, create values and re-vitalise the civil society through strenuous and focused efforts to re-position itself, shun corruption and restore the confidence of the citizenry in the bureaucracy.

The public sector can achieve much in this direction by playing a leading role in the public-private sector initiative, community develop efforts, poverty alleviation and earnest pursuit of the millenium development goals (MDGs). In the words of Agagu (2008): “The time has come in this age of reforms and at a time when the world is ageing, for the public service to re-invent itself and return to its pride of place”. One cannot agree more!

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