

Maurice Iwu's clouds

Wednesday, 31 January 2007

By Okey Ndibe

It is ironic that questions about the validity of Maurice Iwu's first degree should arise at a time the Independent National Electoral Commission, which he heads, was vetting the credentials of candidates pursuing elective office in this year's forthcoming elections. From the outset, Iwu's tenure at the commission has been marked by profound apprehension. A pharmacist by training, he came to the job with significant baggage, including a history of coziness with the infamous Uba trio (Ugochukwu, who was Iwu's colleague at the University of Nigeria; Nnamdi "Andy," President Olusegun Obasanjo's Man Friday; and the stormy petrel himself, Chris). Many believe that the Uba Brothers, now sundered by deep acrimony that a friend of mine has called God-sent, championed Iwu's candidacy, parlaying their influence at Aso Rock to ensure the pharmacist's emergence as the electoral body's helmsman.

While Nigerians often affect a visceral distrust of any electoral umpire, Iwu's tenure has arguably inspired the deepest suspicion. And, I suggest, for understandable reasons. Under Iwu's leadership, the commission adopted a baffling posture in the prolonged legal tussle between Peter Obi and Chris Ngige, the erstwhile governor of Anambra State. After an electoral tribunal

declared Obi the rightful winner of the 2003 gubernatorial polls, INEC, which had earlier defended the integrity of Ngige's victory, made a bizarre somersault. It rushed forward with an appeal alleging that the election had been marred by irreparable irregularities. It therefore asked the court to permit it to conduct a fresh governorship election. That prescription, as some observers discerned, served the designs of the presidency and the Uba Brothers, bent on recapturing the state by crook.

Iwu gave his critics further cause to doubt his independence when he summarily rusticated the majority of Plateau State legislators. The lawmakers' offence was to spurn the president's efforts to manipulate them into ousting then Governor Joshua Dariye. Ostracized by the ruling PDP, the legislators dumped the party. Iwu, who never stirred from slumber when other legislators divorced their parties and decamped to the PDP, suddenly remembered that a legislator who bolted from his party was liable to forfeiture of his seat. He left the impression of a man willing to lend himself as a servile appendage of the presidency. In addition, Iwu's public bashing of Vice President Atiku Abubakar, a man embroiled in a titanic feud with the president, hardly sustained the image of a neutral arbiter.

Most troubling is Iwu's adamant decision to employ electronic voting. Some of us wonder if he's in cahoots with elements determined to sabotage the coming elections. Nigeria's misfortunes in power supply are too well known to forgive the insouciance of a man who insists on electronic voting. Where, we are entitled to wonder, is this man's mind?

INEC's chairman labors under enormous deficits. Were members of the National Assembly alert to their duty as custodians of the popular will, Iwu would long have been sent home. Only last week, he narrowly scraped through another censure from the legislature. As a confidante of one of the senators explained to me: "They seriously considered removing the man, but they were worried that Obasanjo might then bring a worse person to run the elections. So they let him off the hook, but put him on notice that he's being closely watched."

Given the disquieting import of questions about his academic antecedents, the National Assembly should summon Iwu for grilling. Nor should they let him go before he has thoroughly explained the apparent gaps in his academic narrative. A man who presumes to verify office seekers' credentials can ill afford to leave himself open to credibility-damaging questions. A man caught in an ethical bind cuts a pathetic figure if he sets out to screen others. Such is Iwu's quandary.

The searchlight has fully turned on him. As I write, he is far from satisfactorily answering allegations that he made false,

or deceptive, claims about his first degree. The report that no doubt has Iwu sweating was broken by the duo of Sowore Omoyele and Ikenna Ellis-Ezenekwe, and their account was first published at www.saharareporters.com before PM News, an evening publication of TheNews magazine, culled it. Sowore and Ikenna are young and irrepressible cyber reporters, in my view two of the finest specimens of patriotic commitment active on the public stage. They combine a sleuth's unyielding, hardnosed acumen with an admirable idealism and moral vigor. Last week, these two unconventional reporters zoomed in on the enigma of Iwu's first degree. After detailing what is known about the man's academic qualifications, the two wrote: "What appears puzzling is that there is no mention of where and when he obtained his undergraduate degree, a trick made possible by the professional nature of Pharmacy (according to academic experts, students can earn a master's degree in Pharmacy if they go the long haul). However, new information shows that the reason for omitting the mention of Prof. Maurice Iwu's undergraduate degree from the INEC website may not be a mistake after all."

Once their curiosity was piqued by the gap in Iwu's curriculum vitae, the reporters decided to resolve the puzzle. They placed a call to the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom, the academic address from which the INEC boss earned his advanced degrees. Following initial cageyness, a spokesman for the university finally disclosed that Iwu "was enrolled here in 1975 for the

Masters degree in Pharmacy, but we have on our records that he studied Pharmacy in Cameroon during the late 1960s before coming to Bradford.”

Were the information correct, then Iwu would have graduated with a first degree at the age of nineteen. Bradford balked when the reporters sought the name of the Cameroonian university. The reporters contacted Mr. Segun Adeogun, an INEC official, to seek clarifications from Iwu. Instead, they were directed to the incomplete c.v. on the commission’s website. In the face of Sowore’s persistence, Adeogun claimed that the INEC chairman had earned his undergraduate, Masters and PhD degrees from Bradford between 1972 and 1978.

It was not a convincing account. After examining Iwu’s educational history, the reporters surmised that he must have “forged his undergraduate degree to gain entry into University of Bradford in the UK.” Citing some sources, the reporters suggested that the nation’s top electoral officer used his “late brother’s certificate” to enable him to gain admission to Bradford.

Iwu’s response to the report has had the effect, I am afraid, of raising even more questions. Interviewed by Sunny Ofili whose website is www.thetimesofnigeria.com, Iwu initially dismissed the report as “childish allegations.” Then he volunteered: “I bagged my master’s and doctorate degrees from Bradford. I never listed undergraduate because it was a combined program.” He denied ever studying in Cameroon at any time. “Like

I said earlier, I did all my studies at one school. My only contact with Cameroon is my research work which is a United States government funded project.”

The one point on which Iwu seemed most certain was in refuting the report that his brother was deceased. He assured Ofili that his brother was still alive, and lives in Saudi Arabia. That correction should be well taken, but it hardly discredits the larger point in the Sowore/Ellis-Ezenekwe report. If anything, Iwu strikes me as having boxed himself into an uneasy corner by, one, implying that he earned a combined Bachelor’s and Masters at Bradford (before proceeding to the PhD at the same university) and, two, denying that he ever went to school in Cameroon. In the wake of his response, Sowore and Ikenna contacted Bradford. A university spokesman sent them a statement that read in part: “I can confirm beyond doubt that Mr. Iwu did NOT take an undergraduate degree at the University of Bradford. In a student registration form for his Masters course, he declares that his date of arrival in the UK was 10 May 1974, ruling out any involvement with the University prior to this date.” The statement added: “Mr Iwu's record states that he achieved a 'Certificate en Pharmacien' from the Universite Federale ou Cameroun Younde, which he stated he completed in 1968.”

These are potentially damning revelations. It is up to Iwu to reconcile this discrepancy between his account and Bradford’s. A man who is deficient in ethical credit has no business refereeing elections. Unless and until Iwu dispels

the suspicion of doctoring his credentials,
he should be asked to step aside.

Readers' Favorites

1. Nigeria's savaged children
2. The war we ordered is here
3. What I saw in Nigeria
4. Murder Incorporated
5. No Longer at Ease
6. My Vote for Andy Uba
7. Achebe, Soyinka, and the Nigerian Mess
8. My Biafran Eyes
9. My Father's English Friend
10. A female speaker's manly vices
11. The education of Umar Yar'Adua
12. The triumph of barbarism
13. Achebe's apt censure
14. Andy Uba Goes to War (1)
15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
16. Why I Take It Personally
17. Andy Uba's highest bid
18. The folly of the Nigerian elite
19. Fraud Incorporated
20. Etiaba's father, not mine
21. Our laughing president
22. Fayose and God's response
23. My 419 Call
24. A feud of three bulls
25. More reasons to ignore Soyinka
26. Who does Obasanjo work for?

Read or download more titles at

<http://www.okeyndibe.com>

About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

Speaking Engagements

To discuss a speaking engagement, please contact Okey Ndibe by e-mail (okey@okeyndibe.com) or by phone (860.306.7843).

PDF conversions done with Adobe Acrobat Professional 6.0 (US & International Patents) under license to All Hands Business Solutions, Inc.