

Why Iwu Will Go

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By Okey Ndibe

This much is clear to me: Maurice Iwu, the integrity-challenged chairman of the (misnamed) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will not conduct the next round of elections in 2011. Sooner or later – but definitely before 2011 – Mr. Iwu’s chums in the ruling Peoples Democratic Party will find a way to ease him out of the post he has thoroughly disgraced.

It would be wonderful if Mr. Iwu’s exit would herald credible elections in 2011. Sadly, that won’t be the case.

Iwu will leave his post, not because the beneficiaries of his warped elections have seen the light and become born-again believers in free and fair polls. No, the PDP is not about to renounce electoral hanky panky as its default mode.

The PDP has set itself the goal of ruining Nigeria for another sixty years, or until the nation absolutely collapses in a heap. No less an insider than the party’s current national chairman, Vincent Ogbulafor, has disclosed this sixty-year plot.

Why then would a party that can win only by rigging be in a hurry to rusticate Iwu, a patented hand in incompetent elections? The simple truth is that the pharmacist-turned-disastrous electoral

umpire has outlived his “rigging” usefulness. Iwu is like a drug whose expiry date is long past. Iwu must go to enable the ruling party to rent another rigging tool..

For me, the argument over Iwu’s continued chairmanship is actually a strategic deflection. Both Mr. Umaru Yar’Adua and the PDP hierarchy know two facts. One is that Iwu’s image is so stinky that no domestic or international observer will take seriously any elections conducted by the man in 2011. In fact, should Iwu preside over the next round of elections, one should expect a massive boycott of them by opposition parties. The other fact is that, in a country where shame has lost its chastening power, there are thousands willing to out-Iwu Iwu in the overseeing of electoral fraud.

That explains Yar’Adua’s insistence on retaining the power to choose the chairman of the electoral commission. Whilst other political parties are focusing on Iwu’s removal – a done deal – Yar’Adua and the PDP are pretending that the issue is still contentious. Some PDP legislators have even rigged a vote of confidence in Iwu.. There are shadowy press campaigns to burnish Iwu’s irreparable image.

Yet, the ruling party's seeming haste to provide life-support for Iwu is nothing less than a sly maneuver. It's political cynicism at work. Once the Iwu debate hits boiler point, one expects the ruling party to suddenly "sacrifice" Iwu. Its officials will then boast that, since they are "on ground" throughout the nation, they have decided to encourage Iwu to go in order to deny the opposition grounds to whine or gripe after being thrashed in 2011.

Iwu, in his moment of disgrace, can count on being feted by officials of the party he "voted" into power. His name will appear in the list of nominees for national honor. Some misdirected Catholic prelates will summon him to the front pews and decorate him with a benighted knighthood. It'll be a different story with the rest of us. Most Nigerians will jeer Iwu; the man had no business accepting an umpire's job he had no moral spine or ethical funds to discharge.

Yet, just as the opposition and most Nigerians become euphoric over the removal of a man who has come to epitomize electoral fraud, Yar'Adua will quickly sneak in another stooge at INEC. Given its sixty-year nightmare plan for Nigeria, the ruling party is going to ensure that Iwu's successor is as skilled and unabashed a rigging technologist as the former occupant of the INEC seat.

Despite Iwu's (almost) assured exit, one doesn't foresee any scenario that bodes well for the credibility and integrity of the 2011 elections. Mr. Anthony Anenih recently served notice of the rigging tsunami to come in two years. He

implored God to "please grant President Yar'Adua good health to complete his six remaining years." Mr. Anenih is a retired police officer who has parlayed a gift for opportunism and the "fixing" of illicit political goals into stupendous material and political fortune. The man does not speak idly. Nigerians had better grasp his statement as a clear signal that the ruling party has already written the results of the 2011 elections. Whether it's Iwu or somebody else who will "announce" the results to us hardly matters.

Nigerians are in this quandary in the first place because they opted to abide the illegitimacies of the 2007 polls. As a beneficiary of one of history's worst rigged elections, Yar'Adua should not have been permitted to set the agenda for electoral reform. If the man believed in credible elections, he would have proved it by disavowing his office. Iwu or no Iwu, the 2011 elections are already a chronicle of a sham foretold.

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Okey Ndibe is a Nigerian novelist, poet, and political commentator. He is the author of the critically praised novel, *Arrows of Rain*. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988 to be the founding editor of the *African Commentary*, an award-winning and widely acclaimed magazine published by the novelist Chinua Achebe. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. He is finishing work on a novel titled *foreign gods, incorporated*.

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