

Aluko, an outspoken opponent of the International Monetary Fund, will also be retained by the current leadership (see *EIR*, Jan. 16). There are indications that the Abubakar government wants to resume more friendly relations with the IMF, the World Bank, and the Paris Club of creditor nations. Under General Abacha, Nigeria had ceased taking any new loans from the IMF.

At the moment, there is an atmosphere of good will toward General Abubakar, who has released all political detainees, and consulted with all groups, including the long-standing National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) opposition, but the political and economic problems lying ahead are enormous. Given the treacherous role that the British continue to play in Nigeria, and the current meltdown of the global financial system, General Abubakar and Nigeria will need help and understanding to navigate this difficult course.

In the following interview, Lawal Idris, a businessman familiar with the Nigerian government over many years, says, "We must move forward. We have to tell the truth." This same optimism was expressed by General Abubakar in his speech: "Let us all move forward to a new opportunity, with confidence in the present and hope in the future." This sentiment is shared by many Nigerians, who are hopeful that their nation is finally on the right path.

Interview: Lawal Idris

Nigeria requires a national identity

Mr. Idris is a businessman from Kaduna, Nigeria. He was interviewed by telephone on Aug. 3 by Lawrence Freeman.

EIR: A great deal has happened in the last few months. Nigeria's head of state, General Abacha passed away; the leading dissident, Abiola, passed away. What direction do you think Nigeria should take, over the next few months?

Idris: The political field is open to all, and I wish the politicians would be truthful to themselves. The generals say the military is leaving by May 29, 1999, but then there is a snag there, because some people say, let the South take a shot, let the Ibos take a shot, and the minorities are saying, "We want it as well." People are talking, and in one or two months, we will know where we are going.

EIR: What do you mean by, "Let the South take a shot"?

Idris: Let them have the Presidency. But how they are going to do it, I'm not sure.

EIR: One of the things that General Abubakar did, in his speech on July 20, is to disband all five political parties; he said they weren't functioning. He also attacked corruption in his presentation, and he said that a new government, a civilian government, would be in place by May 29, 1999. What do you think? Is that realistic?

Idris: Yes, it can be. I know General Abubakar, and he is not one to go against the Nigerians. He meant every word he said. But it depends on the politicians to make it happen. And, God willing, [the military] will go, on May 29, 1999.

EIR: You mentioned earlier that there has been some discussion in the press, that the Yoruba, especially, are calling for a conference that is being supported by Nadeco [the National Democratic Coalition], a national sovereignty conference. Nadeco has also made proposals that an interim government, to govern for several years, should be picked. General Abubakar did not go in this direction; he said this won't work, and that the military pretty much has to remain in power until the transition is completed in May. What do you think about these calls for a national unity government? Is this the right way to go?

Idris: Never. You see, the majority of Nigerians are united. But the "microscopic Nigerians"—Nadeco and such groups—are not united, because they only look at Nigerian problems from their own point of view: that it has to be done their own way, or not at all. That is, their own type of democracy. So, what Abubakar said, is that there was no need for this congress. If Nadeco wants to form a party as Nadeco, let them go ahead and do it.

Nigeria has passed the point where a tribe can dictate where we go. We have passed the point where we will have a President just because he is a Yoruba, or just because he is an Ibo, or because he is a Hausa. We need a very reliable person who is a *Nigerian*, first and foremost, not a tribal chief.

EIR: Immediately after the death of Chief Abiola, there were some demonstrations and reports of rioting and looting; now things have appeared to calm down. How would you appraise the situation? Is it tense, or are people now prepared to settle down and work together to solve some of the problems?

Idris: At first, when Abacha died, there were no demonstrations, either in the North or the South, because death comes from God. Just as when Abiola was created, God never discussed it with anybody! He came into this world at an appointed time, and he left at an appointed time. But we have to build a nation without Abacha now, and without Abiola. So, we must move forward. We have to tell each other the truth.

Now, there is no tension in Nigeria. There was really not much tension, except in the southwest. And that had been

going on for so long, so there is nothing anybody could do about it. It used to be called the “wild, wild West.” Some parts of it are still like that.

EIR: Do you have any recommendations to people in Nigeria, about what steps the government should take, to bring about a new government by next year?

Idris: If Lawal Idris wants to form a party—himself, his family, and his friends, or whatever—let it be that way. Whoever wants to form a party, let him do it. Let the laborer, the common man, anybody who wants to belong, let them join. Let the government not give anybody any money. There is so much power in the center—that is why everybody is trying to be President. But let every section of society bring their best forward, and a President will be elected, be he a retired military officer, a businessman, or whatever. As long as a majority of Nigerians want this man as President, so be it. Give the judiciary their own powers back.

EIR: What have been the main problems that have prevented Nigeria from achieving the kind of stable government that it had at the very beginning, when it first became independent in 1960?

Idris: The leaders in 1960s were the best crop of leaders Nigeria has ever produced. I am not a prophet of doom, but I don’t think we will ever produce such leaders in my lifetime. First and foremost, they built their own country; they had no selfish interests; so they tried to build up the country. But, unfortunately, a group of military officers thought that these people were corrupt, and so they destroyed the country. That is where the problems came from. But now, if we are ready, we can build the nation.

What we have now are people who are thinking more about their own personal and selfish interests, than about the national interest. You cannot build a nation like that. America was not built like that; a lot of people did a lot of sacrificing.

Nobody wants to lose; everybody wants to win it all. But if you remember the story of Abraham Lincoln, he tried almost everything, and sometimes he failed, but he kept on trying. And he was one of the greatest American Presidents ever produced. I wish we had people who thought that way: If we lose, we try again, and keep trying.

EIR: We have seen that there are great difficulties in getting the Nigerian economy moving. As a reader of *EIR*, you are very familiar with Mr. LaRouche’s proposals for a New Bretton Woods agreement. Do you think this is something that Nigeria should participate in and would benefit from? How do you think that could happen?

Idris: For a long time, I have been thinking along that line. But, the problem we are having, is that the IMF and World Bank have squeezed us so dry, that they can hardly get any blood out of us. It makes people so lazy, when they think they

can get what they want from the government. People are not using their God-given talents, but just want to get everything from the government. But the government does not have the money to give to every individual Nigerian!

If we go for this New Bretton Woods, as Mr. LaRouche has been telling us for quite some time now, at least—not to take it 100% or something like that, but the IMF and World Bank program is a failure! Look at Asia: The economy has been destroyed!

So, we have to look at the economy, but aside from that, we have to look at the people. There are so many people in Nigeria who have not really lived here as a nation; they lived more in the United States, or England, or Germany. When you run away, you don’t contribute anything. How does the economy improve? The Nigerians have to help themselves, if the economy is to improve.

That is what LaRouche has been saying. I have read almost every article of his, for the past four or five years now.

So, just give it a try! That’s what I think.

EIR: The West—in particular Britain, the U.S. media, and sections of the U.S. State Department—have been very, very harsh on Nigeria, over many years, especially after General Abacha came into office. What do you think the United States should do to help Nigeria in this transition process, to get back on its feet, have a stable government and improve its economy?

Idris: What the press writes—the *Washington Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Washington Post*, and so on—I’m sure that President Clinton knows it is not true. They have been saying for four or five years that this country is going under. But it never happened! So what I want Clinton to do is to understand our problems as they are. Our problems are much more than what you hear from your ambassadors, or what people like the Coalition [opposition members] tell you.

You have been to Nigeria several times, and have written about it. You have an idea of what is going on.

They should discuss with the government, the politicians, with the business community. Then they will find out, “These are our problems—not what you think, not what CNN tells you, not what you read in the newspapers.” Unless you understand problems, there is no way you can ever find solutions.

EIR: During President Clinton’s last trip to Africa, he did not visit Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, and he didn’t visit Sudan, the largest country in Africa. Would you like to see President Clinton come and visit Nigeria, before his term expires?

Idris: He’s very much welcome—if he’s allowed. But they are not looking at how well he has been doing with the economy; they are looking at his personal life. I pray he will come out of his problems. He is very much welcome, and I’m sure every Nigerian would like to have him visit our country.