
Interview: G.O.M. Tasié and Charles C. Okigbo

Nigerian Professors Discuss Strategies Toward Youth with LaRouche Reps

Professor G.O.M. Tasié is the chairman of the Agency for Reorientation, Integrity, Service, and Ethics (ARISE) in Rivers State, Nigeria under Gov. Peter Odunuya Odili. ARISE, which Odili founded, is an institution whose mission is to eliminate corruption and moral degeneracy in government, business, and among the general population. An important emphasis has been placed on the extermination of “cultism” and restiveness among the youth. Dr. Tasié is formerly a board member at the University of Jos in Jos, Nigeria where he was the editor of the Journal of Niger Delta Studies, which presents an in-depth history of the Niger Delta, with a special focus on the history of British colonial activity and the spread of Christianity in the region.

In a publication issued by ARISE on Rivers State government conduct, he likened its elected officials to the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians, only there, the officials are apostles of good governance, in the name of the People’s Democratic Party.

EIR’s Lawrence Freeman and Summer Shields of the LaRouche Youth Movement interviewed Professor Tasié on Aug. 3, 2006 at his office in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State. Also taking part in the interview was Prof. Charles C. Okigbo, Ph.D., Department of Communication, North Dakota State University. The discussion centered largely on the moral uplifting and character development of the youth as representatives of the future United States and Nigeria.

Freeman: When we talked with Governor Odili, he pointed to your group as an important part of changing the culture, and according to your brochure, you have a mandate for moral rediscovery. So, first, could you tell us what the need was that required your group to come about, and then, two, what your group actually does?

Tasié: ARISE is the brainchild of Gov. Peter Odili, as part of his reformation, renaissance, for the state. A lot of bad habits have been formed over the years. A lot of vices have become very much part of the society, and it’s his thinking that there should be some reform, and then some restoration of the dignity of the peoples of the Niger Delta, and the Rivers State in particular. It’s easy to count on one’s achievement entirely, or basically, in times of physical development, structures, and so forth, but it is the thinking, and rightly

so, of Governor Odili, that without some moral base, all this can collapse. If the society is so much infested with corruption, laziness, people not being transparent, and not honest, and do not commit themselves to service, and have the appropriate ethical attitudes to work, and to their profession, or whatever it is, we are simply building on a sandy soil, as we tend to say.

Now, given that tall assignment, our approach to it has been first to create an awareness whereby every member of the society is encouraged or urged to look at this project, as something for everybody, in which everybody has to be involved, not just as a government program, or government agency. And so, in doing this, we have addressed issues in general, and specifically, the violence, terrorism, and the kind of crisis and ills of our society. And we do this by organizing public lectures, by organizing television interviews and programs, using jingles, using the media, print and electronic, such as—we had at one stage what we called the ARISE Half-Hour, in which people coming from different backgrounds and different experiences talked. And because we also want to reach the youth.

Freeman: What year did this program begin?

Tasié: 2003.

Freeman: And most of your work is conducted in seminars, or educational?

Tasié: Yes. Seminars, educational, and public enlightenment programs. We go to the villages, we encourage communities to set up their own ARISE cells within the community, the local government areas, in the villages, and even in the prisons. And we are calling on churches to preach the ARISE gospel, so to say.

Freeman: But you don’t offer any kind of jobs, or material assistance? Is it all in terms of discussion and forums and seminars?

Tasié: Yes, we have seminars. As a matter of fact, we’re in the process of publishing the proceedings, and some of the papers given in the seminars. One is already ready; we’ll give you a copy of it. That was something we organized for the local government functionaries, and people gave addresses on security, on prudence, on accountability.

Freeman: And how much of the population are you able to reach out to, in this discussion process?

Tasie: Oh, I would say the entire Rivers people, because when you have a television program, you assume that. And our programs have been quite popular. They've been presented as talks. They've also been presented as plays, drama, direct, indirect means, and then in the vernacular languages, and pidgin English, and so forth.

Freeman: You mentioned the youth. Are there particular problems in terms of crime, or drugs, or sexual promiscuity? What do you concentrate on with the youth?

Tasie: Oh, every problem imaginable in which they are involved. Some of them were presented as drama, which we found quite popular, quite interesting. . . . We work in collaboration with the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture. They produce plays. We sell the idea to them, and tell them the particular thing we want to tackle; like we devoted one to addressing the issue of violence. And the police did something for us, and we showed them on the television and go with them to some communities. . . .

Freeman: Now, it would seem to me that to tackle the problem of the youth, which I imagine is a very, very large part of the population, that unless somehow you also had a program to provide for increasing the material standard of living, to give them jobs, to put them to work, to occupy their day, you can't really tackle it by just educational work. In the United States, growing sections of our youth are facing the same problem we are discussing. And in Nigeria, you have just an enormous number of youth, who are unemployed, or misemployed, or in the informal economy. How do you deal with that problem?

Tasie: We are concentrating on the educational, persuasive aspects of the problem. The adolescent program of the state, which was founded by Her Excellency, the wife of the governor of the state—this one concentrates on providing some kind of training, to have the youth acquire some skill, and thereafter they are given some help to start whatever skill they like and that keeps them busy and employed. And we talk to this group also while they are into their training, and so that aspect is really aiming at helping the youth to be self-employed. While, if the jobs are available, the opportunity is also there for a few, because the jobs are not multiplying for a number of factors, but the focus is how to help the young people employ themselves. They're getting into all kinds of training, how to repair televisions, sewing, even how to repair



EIRNS/Lawrence Freeman

Summer Shields of the LaRouche Youth Movement (left) with Prof. G.O.M. Tasie. Shields briefed the professor on the LYM's work in bringing Classical culture to America's youth, in the course of organizing them politically to rebuild the bankrupt world economy.

telephone sets; a variety of things and skills are being taught. And when they graduate, the students are given money and equipment to start them off.

Dialogue With the LYM

Shields: One of the questions I had in terms of the drama: In our office in the United States we've performed drama often in our office. We've performed [Shakespeare's] *Julius Caesar*, we've worked on Friedrich Schiller's *Don Carlos*, and what we do have is work on a lot of the Western Classics as a moral building mechanism, but also building of the mind. Do you engage in Shakespeare or Schiller?

Tasie: No, the drama here is of a local content, what you might say quite relevant to the experiences of the people. So you might find in some of these dramas, the marketplace, the ordinary persons of the society. It is a way out of the contemporary problems of our time. We will look at ones that address the issues of the moment.

Shields: One of the reasons we chose *Julius Caesar* is because it is a good representation of what happens to your society when your culture falls apart. What's wrong with the society's state of mind that causes your civilization to fall? Do any of the plays that you're talking about address this?

Tasie: Well, rather than that, here you will find people adopting plays like “Things Fall Apart”—something within their own experience; otherwise you’ll be leaving them imagining what it is you’re talking about.

We found that they appreciate them. Right now, home movies, as they call them here, now are becoming quite popular. Unfortunately, when you have Western movies that seem to interest the youth here, they are the violent type, which we try to discourage whenever we can. If we had our way, we would censor the movies that come from abroad to this place. But what we cannot do formally, we try to do informally by increasing interest and even encourage them to form their own groups for whatever script has been prepared for them. It’s not just for entertainment, but it’s also for education and moral building.

Shields: One of the things we did in 2003, was we ran a slate of about eight young people for local Democratic Party official status as a kind of introduction into politics, and one of the problems that we also have, as you know, is a decadent Western culture. We’ve got some of the living standards that are completely different, but the culture is generally not the healthiest thing for the mind. Is there any move towards the introduction of these youth into politics?

Tasie: In some parts, they talk about the youth parliament. Of course, we recognize the fact that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. And if they want to ensure tomorrow for their survival, then they had better start now getting to it. And one area where they are doing this formally and effectively is through the Student Union. We encourage the Student Union movement. It is quite a vibrant group and they talk about anything, any issues—they try to address them and they are allowed to show interest in these matters and express their views. We also are aware that, particularly, the undergraduates sometimes get unnecessarily violent, and we will try to address those issues too, using youth, because if you had someone like myself trying to talk about youth problems—well, I have to learn about their problems from them.

So, what we’ve done is to try to identify people who ordinarily would be our informants if we were doing some research to develop the ideas themselves, and as youth, have them address their fellow youth. Because they understand the world in which they live, even if they do not totally accept what the other ones are doing. And when you have those types of people coming to talk with them, it’s far more effective than, “Ah! Those old men, their time is gone!”

Shields: This is actually one of the things Mr. [Lyndon] LaRouche brings up with our youth movement. He brings up the problem of the Baby Boomer phenomenon inside of the United States, which is, as you know, the generation born after the troops came back after World War II, that have literally had a mentality that has pretty much brought U.S. culture

down. They were the drug-rock-sex culture of the ’60s and ’70s, and which now, our generation is the drug-rock-sex culture of the United States. What our movement engages in, is we have youth cadres, youth leadership training where we work on science, constructive geometry, and youth teaching youth; and we have classes twice a week, and we are engaged politically, and we go out and recruit young people, even from the college campuses where the education isn’t as good as what they have with us. Do you have anything like the youth teaching of youth here?

Tasie: Not in the same sense as you have in the United States but, in some senses, yes. Like when the youth address or partake in some of our programs here on the television, you’ll find that whatever they are saying can be of interest to the older generation, but their target is actually the youth. In that way, or when we go out to the villages and the communities, those who are addressing the youth rallies are fellow youth. Some might be the presidents of the National Union of Rivers State Students. We certainly appreciate the value in youth addressing youth.

Then there’s the kind of music that they enjoy. If we want to attract them to the place where we are having the event, then we play the kind of music that attracts their fellow youth. Whereas, if it was for people like me, then we would be talking about Classical music or something, but they know their kind of music—reggae and all that, and hip-hop and all that—they’ll come, get introduced to the place, and then the actual program starts.

Freeman: It’s too bad that we don’t have more time, but it might be very useful if you could have Summer interact with some of the youth.

Tasie: Oh yes, oh yes. But if we had more notice that you were coming, we would have arranged for them to be here. If there is ever any opportunity and you are coming here, we can arrange that.

Shields: I would like that.

Freeman: The older people unintentionally will suffocate the younger people.

Okigbo: We hope that we can establish a relationship with you, so that with time, it might be possible to bring some people from the U.S. over here for a period of time for an orientation program, and then vice versa, to arrange for some young people to see how things are done in the U.S. for a period of time too.

Freeman: I think that would be quite phenomenal to have American youth and Nigerian youth, and the fact that it would be young people would be very revolutionary.

Soon after this interview was held, Nigeria’s President ordered a security crackdown in the region in response to a wave of kidnappings.