

Prof. PAT UTOMI NAMES KEY NIGERIANS IN SHADOW GOVERNMENT



Prominent economist and political activist, Prof. Pat Utomi, has inaugurated a shadow government composed of members from various opposition parties. According to Utomi, the “Big Tent Coalition Shadow Government,” launched virtually will function as a credible opposition force, highlighting the failures of the Bola Tinubu administration while offering ideas for better governance. But in a swift reaction, the Federal Government kicked against the move, describing it as an aberration in a federal system of government. In an interview with The PUNCH, the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, said, “At a time when our nation is set to celebrate 26 unbroken years of presidential democracy, the idea of a so-called “shadow government” is an aberration. “Nigeria is not a parliamentary system where such a system is practised, and there is no provision for such in our statute books. “While opposition politics is a central feature of democracy, it must be practiced at all times within the bounds of propriety. “This idea of a shadow government sadly does not pass that test. Our bicameral legislature

amply features members of the opposition, and it should be the right place to contest meaningful ideas for nation-building.” Utomi, however, justified the move, arguing that policy missteps by the current Federal Government had worsened poverty, driven multinational companies out of the country, and intensified terrorism in Benue and Plateau states, alongside rising insecurity and corruption nationwide. The don expressed concern over what he described as the government's resort to propaganda and the suppression of opposing views. “The recent spate of defections to the All Progressives Congress provides further evidence that all is not well with democracy in Nigeria,” he said. “The imperative is that if a genuine opposition does not courageously identify the performance failures of incumbents, offer options, and influence culture in a counter direction, it will be complicit in subverting the will of the people.”

He said the shadow cabinet—made up of figures drawn from several opposition parties—was created to respond to what he called a national emergency. “Today, I bring to this pioneer body the desperate cries of a people troubled by how their reality seems bound for serfdom. I challenge you to awaken these people who wrongly believe that everything is fine as long as they can manage a share of what little still trickles down from crude oil sales,” Utomi said. Human rights lawyer, Dele Farotimi, was named head of the Ombudsman and Good Governance portfolio. Others appointed to the policy delivery unit include Oghene Momoh, Cheta Nwanze, Daniel Ikuonobe, Halima Ahmed, David Okonkwo, and Obi Ajuga. Other members of the shadow cabinet include Dr. Adefolusade Adebayo, Dr. Peter Agadah, Dr. Sadiq Gombe, Chibuzor Nwachukwu, Salvation Alibor, Bilkisu Magoro, Dr. Victor Tubo, Charles Odibo, Dr. Otive Igbuzor, Eunice Atuejide, Gbenga Ajayi, and Dr. Mani Ahmad, as well as Peter Oyewole and Dr. Omano Edigheji. Utomi stated that the shadow government would hold weekly cabinet meetings to assess government policies and propose practical alternatives. He identified immediate priorities as the stimulation of production, the formulation of a coherent economic growth strategy, decentralization of security, and constitutional reform. The cabinet, he said,

would also focus on providing alternatives in healthcare, education, infrastructure development, law and order, and policy monitoring. “This shadow team must also address issues of ethics, transparency, and integrity, which continue to challenge this government at every turn,” Utomi said. “Nothing is more urgent than tackling the rising poverty across the country. Multinationals are shutting down, and millions are unemployed. Just two recent company exits illustrate how poorly thought-out policies have tanked the economy.” He criticized the ruling party's alleged reliance on propaganda, comparing it to fascist tactics meant to stifle critical debate. “The resort to propaganda as a tool of governing, by the party in power, makes rational discussion of the decisions of the APC government difficult, moving us more towards fascist conditions. Like Joseph Goebbels inoculated Germans to Hitler's deadly path, a massive shower of propaganda insults seeks to prevent patriots from factually critiquing policy choices of the government, and the behavior of its agents, which can have more negative consequences on our well-being,” he said.

Utomi also addressed the controversial removal of the petroleum subsidy, arguing that the decision was poorly sequenced and executed. “Making propaganda of most leaders being in agreement on removing the petroleum subsidy was to cover up policy errors of how to remove it without further structural damage to the economy. The sequencing of actions could have produced different outcomes than driving the people into penury,” he said. He added that economic revival depends heavily on stimulating production through policies that support entrepreneurship and local value chains—an area he claims the current administration fails to grasp. “Unfortunately, corruption and short-sighted self-interest have prevented sensible policy choice and passionate implementation,” Utomi stated.

“The argument that pain from policies is inevitable is giving a lie by the wasteful use of public resources for executive comfort in Jets, Yachts, and frequent travel. Pain evenly spread breeds consensus that accelerates implementation.” Utomi challenged the shadow cabinet to propose and promote a practical economic growth strategy. “Don't worry if they steal your ideas and use them—the gain is for Nigeria,” he said. On security, he noted that parts of Benue and Plateau states have been deserted due to terrorist attacks, with no visible government strategy in place to address the crisis. “The threat to peace and the effect of uncertainty on economic activity make this such an important issue more appropriate for emergency measures than that which led to the unconstitutional ousting of Rivers state Governor Sim Fubara,” he said. He advocated a decentralized

policing structure, arguing that communities should have their own armed and trained forces, complemented by state police and a Federal National Guard. “Policing for me is a local function. We will travel further if we get the communities to have their own armed and well-trained police forces, which will be layered State police and the Federal National Guard. It appears the corruption 'benefit' of centralization is fanning rationalization of centralization,” he said.

He added that the political class appears more focused on positioning for elections than serving the people. “So much seems rooted in politics and positioning for elections that service to the people seems to be a forgotten proposition. This shadow team must emphasize returning to the people and enabling their pursuit of happiness. That is the purpose of the government. Too much misery parades itself in our country, and it needs to be forced out.” Utomi said. He also tasked the cabinet with upholding



ethical standards and integrity, which, he alleged, are absent in the current administration. “This shadow team also has to deal with matters of ethics, transparency and integrity that seem to challenge this government at every turn. The policy team of the new tribe has a detailed analysis of the Lagos-Calabar contract and state capture. They can provide you with quality input,” he said. He stressed that promoting ethical governance is essential to sustainable economic development. “I note also with great pain the pervasive state of corruption in current reality. All effort to showcase integrity and transparency as value must be made,” he added. Other members of the shadow cabinet include Sidi Ali, Ibrahim Abdulkarim, Adenike Oriola, Promise Adewusi, Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, Mr. Ambrose Obimma, Rwang Pam, Dr. Kingsley Anedo, Prof. Auwal Aliyu, Dr. Ghazali Ado, Ms. Nana Kazaure, Aisha Yusuf, Dr. Charles Gilbert, and Olujimi Akiboh.