

# Wike crash landed Ikpeazu, Ortom, Ugwuanyi to Electoral Defeat, Political Oblivion

*Three of the five aggrieved governors of the People's Democratic Party lost their bids to go to the Senate, Dirisu Yakubu examines the implication of the loss for the governors and the members of the Integrity Group led by the outgoing Governor of Rivers State, Nyesom Wike*

**F**or months, reconciliatory efforts were made by chieftains of the People's Democratic Party to bring its aggrieved five governors back to its fold but to no avail. For Nyesom Wike, the governor of Rivers State and leader of the Integrity Group, together with his four colleagues, Seyi Makinde of Oyo State, Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia State, Samuel Ortom of Benue State and Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State, there was no pathway to peace unless Iyorchia Ayu, the National Chairman of the PDP stepped aside before the elections. The governors premised their anti-Ayu stand on the alleged violation of the PDP constitution which provides for fair distribution of elective and national offices between the North and South. They maintained that with Atiku Abubakar's emergence as the party's presidential candidate, Ayu's continued chairmanship was no longer acceptable.

Following the collapse of peace talks between the two sides, Atiku kept Ayu and worked with loyal governors of the party for the presidential election which was held on February 25.

PDP chieftains including its immediate past National Chairman, Prince Uche Secondus, ex-National Secretary, Ibrahim Tsauri, former Governors Ahmed Makarfi (Kaduna), Sule Lamido (Jigawa), Ibrahim Idris (Kogi) and a host of others had argued that it was in the interest of the rebellious governors to sheathe their swords and team up with Atiku.

Tsauri was particularly philosophical; he told our correspondent in an interview that "It is better for your enemy to win in your party than for your friend to win in a rival party." As it were, the Wike-led group rebuffed the gestures and counsel of party faithful including their colleague governors. In several meetings held home and abroad, Wike assured the PDP that lessons would be learnt the hard way, even as he vowed on behalf of others to reveal their adopted candidate before the election. But unlike Wike who was not contesting any position, Makinde is seeking re-election while the trio of Ortom, Ikpeazu and Ugwuanyi were seeking seats in the Senate to represent their respective senatorial districts. At the final



**Wike**

collation of ballots however, the outgoing governors lost their elections, granting their enemies and political opponents the grounds to mock them. Ortom lost to Titus Zam of the All Progressives Congress in the race for the Benue North-West Senatorial District. Zam, who served as Special Adviser to Governor Ortom on Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs before his defection to the APC, polled a total of 143,151 votes to defeat Ortom who polled 106,882 votes. Like Ortom, Ugwuanyi had no answer to the Peter Obi-induced Labour Party hurricane that swept across the country in a spectacular fashion. His bid to represent Enugu North was frustrated by Okechukwu Ezea of the LP whose 104,948 votes were far above the governor's 46,948 votes. The story was the same with

Ikpeazu who lost to the All Progressives Grand Alliance candidate, Enyinnaya Abaribe, who garnered a total of 49, 903 votes to beat LP's Chinedu Onyeizu and Ikpeazu as the duo secured 43, 903 and 28, 422 votes respectively.

Some analysts who spoke to our correspondent made some posers; were the governors not aware that Wike had little to lose in the game that saw them more as anti-party agents than believers in the PDP creed? Could they have won had they remained loyal to the Ayu-led National Working Committee without bickering? And didn't they know it was difficult for people to vote for different parties in elections that held the same day and the same polling units at the same time, since they already took a stand not to support their party in the presidential election? There seems to be no straight answers to these posers but Timothy Osadolor, the Deputy National Youth Leader of the PDP, is of the view that the outgoing governors failed to realise that they had a life outside their agitation for Ayu to go.

Osadolor said, "These governors and their subservient friendship with Governor Wike was always going to be a poisoned chalice to their political fortune in and outside the party. Today, they will be in the inner recess of their rooms wondering where they lost it. It was always safer for them to stay with the PDP and they would have had a more successful outing. Tomorrow is another day. I wish them well."

A member of the National Executive Committee of the PDP and former Jigawa State Governor, Sule Lamido, absolved Wike of blame, noting that other members of the Integrity Group ought to have realised the implication of what they were getting into when they moved against the party that brought them into national prominence.

He said Governors Ortom, Ikpeazu and Ugwuanyi had no one but themselves to blame for the



**Ikpeazu**



**Ortom**



**Ugwuanyi**

electoral misfortune they suffered on Saturday. He added, "They (the three governors) misled themselves. They are mature enough to understand the danger of their actions to their political fortune." Sharing the same thought is Eddy Olafeso, former National Vice Chairman (South-West) of the PDP.

According to him, Ortom, Ugwuanyi and Ikpeazu "have now realised too late that not all that glitters is gold. It is obvious that they lost owing largely to their anti-party activities and refusal to heed wise counsel. While the crisis lasted, some of us begged them to give peace a chance but they did not listen.

"The party pleaded but nothing happened. I won't say they were led astray by Governor Wike because they are adults. They are regretting even though as men, they won't admit. It is painful for them because they lost in the traditional homes of the PDP. "How they put themselves together after this is up to them but the biggest losers in this election are the Nigerian people. They expressed their love for Atiku but the system was manipulated to give the governing party victory. The question to ask is on what basis would Nigerians have re-elected a party that has been subjected to untold hardship for the past eight years? The past three months have been particularly tough." He however hailed Atiku for the way he handled the matter.

Olafeso stated, "In all this, I salute the statesmanship of Atiku Abubakar who has remained presidential throughout this turbulence. We hope those governors have realised that without the party, they are just like every other human being out there. Wike couldn't have made them senators. That is the bitter truth they have learned belatedly." The immediate past Deputy National Publicity Secretary of the party and member of NEC, Diran Odeyemi, in a telephone conversation with *Sunday PUNCH*, blamed both the aggrieved governors and the Ayu-

***"This is why it is important to listen to wise counsel because when political mistakes are made by seekers of elective offices, they are difficult to correct. In the next two months or thereabouts, they would be former governors and the razzmatazz would be over. "You cannot attempt to bring down the house that provided you with shelter for years and expect no consequences. The reality before them is that the show is almost now over. Wike who was not vying for any elective office after losing the presidential primaries of the party succeeded in taking them on a long lonely ride. Now, the rest is history." he said.***

led NWC.

He said, "Our governors who wanted to come to the senate are smart politicians but they miscalculated. They never knew events would turn out this way for them. Now, there is no doubt that they are down. "They believed in what they were being told, forgetting that they were candidates on the platform of the PDP. Come on, that does not make much sense, if you ask me. Wike got away with his because he was not a candidate. "We kept saying that Wike, who was not vying for any office, had nothing to lose. He successfully led them to believe that all was well, only for them to realise too late that a political party needs candidates as much as candidates need a platform to actualise their aspirations."

He said Ayu and his loyalists could not afford to laugh at Ortom and others because the outcome of the election was nothing they could be proud of. Now that both sides are down, it is time for sober reflection and deep thinking on how to move forward as a party." However, Odeyemi came short of predicting mass exodus of PDP members in the weeks ahead saying, "My worry is that someone like Ayo Fayose has come out to say that he no longer wants to be associated with the PDP. He believes our problems are self-inflicted. Now, how many people are currently thinking like the former Ekiti State governor? What are they likely to do and how will that affect the PDP? "The painful thing is that these could have been avoided. No side was ready to shift right or left and at the end, we are where we are today. It is unfortunate." Another PDP Chieftain, Mustapha Shehu, who served as the Director-General of the Borno House-House campaign for Atiku/Okowa, noted that political mistakes were easily made but difficult to correct immediately.

"The affected governors would pause in secret to ask themselves some rhetorical questions: how did we get here; what do we have left of our political careers; has the end come so soon? They were to represent their people with brilliant ideas to implement but they now have to wait for another four years before trying again. In the next four years, they would be critics, offering perspectives on how it should have been done. Nothing more." He said it was always important for political actors to always be ready to embrace dialogue. He added, "This is why it is important to

listen to wise counsel because when political mistakes are made by seekers of elective offices, they are difficult to correct. In the next two months or thereabouts, they would be former governors and the razzmatazz would be over. "You cannot attempt to bring down the house that provided you with shelter for years and expect no consequences. The reality before them is that the show is almost now over. Wike who was not vying for any elective office after losing the presidential primaries of the party succeeded in taking them on a long lonely ride. Now, the rest is history." he said.

Although the aggrieved governors failed to name their preferred presidential candidate as previously boasted by Wike; findings showed that they ended up working for Tinubu and Obi. While Wike delivered Rivers State's votes to the APC, the first time an opposition won in the State; Ortom publicly endorsed Obi but was even defeated by the APC in the state. Ugwuanyi and Ikpeazu who didn't openly reveal their candidates reportedly chose Atiku at the 11th hour, even as pundits argue that the duo simply faced their own election and allowed voters to make up their minds on who to vote for in the presidential election. As it were, incumbency is fast losing its potency as a determinant of victory in the nation's political system. Ben Ayade, the outgoing Governor of Cross River State, lost his senatorial ambition even as the quest of Darius Ishaku, his Taraba State counterpart, to head for the Red chamber was similarly thwarted by the opposition party in the state.

While Saturday's elections didn't turn out in favour of Ortom, Ikpeazu and Ugwuanyi, the March 11 elections would reveal whether Makinde would win his re-election bid. Even though the APC won the presidential election, the three senatorial seats and eight out of the 10 House of Representatives seats so far announced, leaving the PDP with two seats, supporters of the governor and the PDP in the state are confident of his victory. They said the governor had performed creditably and that his accomplishments would speak for him next Saturday, regardless of the party's performance in the presidential and National Assembly elections.