

WHEN GOVERNMENT IS INSENSITIVE

By Moses Oludele Idowu

*"The government is the problem, not the answer."
- Ronald Reagan (1911-2004)*

There is one thing about APC that often worries me. There is something about the government of APC that often unsettles and gives me concerns. It is its a historical, anti- intellectual, un scholarly, banal and pedestrian attitude and social behavior which is generally reflected in the government it heads, in its policy initiatives and directives and even in its motivation, inputs and directives. In short, it is in its attitude and manner now commonplace to act first and think later. We have a danger on our hands. We are trapped as a people. Because we have a government and a party that are both averse to intellectual rigor, mental exertions, thorough examination of ideas for their long-term implications and even workability. It is now clear to all who can see that APC rarely thinks about the implications of their policies and rarely care about the consequences of their policies and the long - term effects and sustainability of what they promulgate as policy framework. Without any planning or study on ground Muhammadu Buhari publicly declared the creation of Nigerian Airlines. Through that precipitate action alone and for lack of proper and due diligence Nigeria lost N1billion naira. After many lies and deceits and having squandered billions of naira that same government left the stage without a single aircraft and with nothing like Nigerian Air, except in the convoluted and diseased imagination of APC leaders and their unfortunate thoughtless followers. I can regale you with several policies and directives of that government of APC showing there was little or nothing of study, rigour or mental capacity behind them. Act first, then think later. That was Buhari government and the APC.

It seems it is with that same attitude that Bola Ahmed Tinubu is approaching governance after "grabbing, snatching and running" with the presidential victory in the controversial 2023 "election." His first major action reflected APC standard trademark of "act first and think later" when he thoughtlessly and "under inspiration" removed fuel subsidy by mere



announcement without any proper study of the effects, implications and consequences on the average person, the economy and the nation at large and without any buffers or props on which the people and especially the vulnerable segment of the society could fall.

That singular incident has occasioned the most acute suffering, the most intense hardship on the generality of the population than anything I yet know. In a lifetime of three score years I am yet to see a policy of government that has brought so much suffering, so deepening poverty and privations, acute and terrible hardship on the greatest number of citizens like this one. Today the government has seen its error and has now reverted to subsidy regime but the havoc remains and irreparable. This is the result of acting before thinking. Government policies are not issued and conceived by coming under inspiration, they are worked out based on studies, mental rigour and deep thinking. There at least two or three other instances within the last one year of this government showing this tendency to act first before thinking, that I am beginning to think it is a trademark of APC. It is against this backdrop that I now move on the latest in the baggage of thoughtless policies and directives, the very asinine and wobbly directive that students must attain the age of 18 before being allowed to sit for WAEC/NECO/UTME. This was rolled out few days ago by the Minister of Education, one Tahir

Mamman. In other words this directive stipulates that with effect from next year (or is it this year?) a child cannot sit for those exams unless he or she is 18.

This is the trouble with our government and especially APC, the party controlling the government. Do they ever think? Is there any study behind what they dish out as policies? Do they examine the workability, the sustainability or even consequences of what they promulgate as policies? Or, - which is worse, - is this party and government bent on national subversion of educational potentials of a large segment of the population? Is it that the people who make our policies do not think or cannot think? Just a little thought would have shown that this would lead to nothing but chaos and if implemented would destroy the educational foundations of many children.

I am troubled at the kind of mind that superintends our educational policies at the highest levels. I am troubled at the sheer wooden-headedness behind this policy and the tragedy this would bring to many children if implemented. Ronald Reagan's observation of "the government is the problem" has now found fulfillment in APC and in the Tinubu administration.

problem. How the government does intend to solve this needless problem? Think of students getting to final year at the top of the class and being stopped from writing exams because they are under-age at 16 or 15. Where would they be going when both parents go to work? It is a different thing if government is considering a bridging education as a stop gap. Would they start learning a trade after going to school while waiting till they are eligible to write examination? Would they still be smart enough to remember what they learned after two years of waiting at home doing nothing? What then will they be doing at home till they are 18 since there is no almajiri system in the South? Or is this government trying to create one with masses of frustrated students? Educational Foundation psychologists and experts tell us that after five years of a course of study without any practice to make use of what one has learned and without any refresher courses in the same study, a person lapses back into illiteracy. Now think of a student being kept at home after completing secondary school at 15 waiting for 3 years to write exams. Would he still be sound to take the exams again having largely forgotten what he has learned? Where is this policy leading to? Who is bent on destroying the educational

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Let us examine this policy and see the tragedy it would bring before going into its foolishness. First, consider that most of the children in the final year or semi- final year in most secondary schools today, both private and public are in their 15th or 16th year of age. If this policy is implemented this year or even next year it means few students in our private schools will enroll students for WAEC/NECO. I know this to be true in the Southwest and the South in general. It then means many schools and parents may resort to fraud by forging the birth certificates of their children or withdraw the children after completing secondary education to wait at home for another two years till they are eligible to write the exams. Do you get it? A child has been leading the class from even the first year of school and now gets to final year at 16 but cannot write the exams to proceed to the next stage of tertiary education not because he/ she is unwilling or unable but because a government of bandits has ambushed him with a bad policy, the product of a beclouded, locked -in thinking and confusion. Most children in the South will face this problem. Most of the children in private secondary schools and even public secondary schools will encounter this

foundations of the South and especially the West? Before now standard age of admission to universities is 16. Has any university complained to the Minister of Education that her students cannot cope with the intellectual rigour?

Two, if you look at the pattern of examination results in the last few years you again see this policy as not been well- thought out. Most of the highest scorers in both WAEC/NECO/ UTME in the last few years have been under -17 and the standard of examination has not lowered. Also look at most of the First Class awardees from the universities and their age; they were mostly those who got admission at 16. If therefore the students are coping at 16 years of age why extend it to 18 if not a sinister agenda to destroy and truncate the educational hopes of a section of the country? They increased the fees for university education and we didn't complain, we still enroll our children at great sacrifice because we value education. They introduced Students Loan and skew it in such a way that the region that made the least contributions to revenue got the best allocation to her students. Northern students and universities have gotten the largest share of Student's Loans packaged by this government,

the West got very little and Southeast is completely cut off as if it is not part of the Federation. Still we didn't complain, we still enrolled our children all the same and refused to withdraw them, at great personal costs. Now a policy must be used to prevent many Southerner children from education and from the universities. What increase if fees won't do, a policy must be invented and enforced to do. This, we shall resist both legally and by all means available. No government has the right and the power to legislate or promulgate a policy that destroys the future of an entire generation because it is intellectually lazy and cannot think.

In Mamman Tahir's north, government is conducting mass wedding and giving 15- year olds for marriage to procreate children to swell their population for increased votes during election (?). If he is not aware of this then he is ignorant; if he is aware of it and does not know the implications then he is mischievous. What has Minister Tahir done about this and other elites of the North? But his worries are to stop 16 year- olds from furthering their educational career. So in Tahir's Nigeria a 15 - year old can marry and bring forth children but she cannot write exams or further her education. Sometimes, when I ponder on Buhari and Tinubu's administrations I almost conclude that APC actually means Almajiri People's Congress.

Let us now consider one more fact because I don't want this essay to be lengthy: physical age versus maturity age. I do hope that the people in the Education Ministry know that there is a difference between physical age (or natural or biological age of a child) and maturity age of the same child. In a nation as diverse as Nigeria a policy with a uniform age that subsumes the entire demographic of student population within a specific ambit is bound to be counterproductive.

Look at it. A 15- year old Northern girl may be bodily or physically stronger than her Southern counterpart but is likely to be less matured and sophisticated than her Southern age mate. Put in another way, a 16- year old child in Lagos may be older in Maturity Age than his biological age mate from Zamfara or Katshina - all things been equal. A

child could be 15 or 16 and be even more matured than a 20 - year old elsewhere. What we should worry about is that a student is emotionally and mentally matured to withstand intellectual rigour and mental exertions of a university

education instead of just putting arbitrary obstacles on the path of students. Does this student have the intellectual sophistication and mental adequacy to cope or go through higher education? In real life what is the difference between an 18- year old and a 16- year old? My daughter took the GCE exams at 15 and passed with flying colours we still kept her in school just to attain the mandatory 16 years before she could write JAMB and gain admission to the university. Her younger brother had to be kept at home for two years just to attain the mandatory 16 years before going to the university even after passing the exams in flying colours. Now that the age has been extended to 18, I am afraid that their younger brother who is always top of the class from primary school may have to stay at home for possibly 3 years before he is eligible to even sit for the examination. Doing what? I have no farm or trade to send him to assist me. That is the tragedy that is loading which the Tinubu administration is about to unleash on the people of this nation and the future generations. That is why I am worried for these children and many in their class. I am a patriot and have always fought for Nigeria and its indissolubility and against ethnic nationalities or separatist movements. I have always fought against break-up of Nigeria not because I get anything from this nation but I believe that Nigeria has been simply unlucky and, like a woman with a succession of bad and irresponsible suitors, has not been given a chance.

But today I must confess that having watched the terrible atrocities and havocs done by the APC administrations in the last 9 years, its pedestrian, anti-intellectual attitudes to governance, its corrupt, illiterate and self- serving elites, mediocre policies, my faith in this nation is shaken. Possibly the promoters of Yoruba Nation and Biafra may know something that I am not seeing and have not been seeing. Possibly, I too am taking

Nigeria too seriously than I should have. In the meantime I have hoped that this policy will be reversed or defeated. It is indeed sad. Indeed, in NIGERIA the government is the problem not the answer.

This is the trouble with our government and especially APC, the party controlling the government. Do they ever think? Is there any study behind what they dish out as policies? Do they examine the workability, the sustainability or even consequences of what they promulgate as policies? Or, - which is worse, - is this party and government bent on national subversion of educational potentials of a large segment of the population? Is it that the people who make our policies do not think or cannot think? Just a little thought would have shown that this would lead to nothing but chaos and if implemented would destroy the educational foundations of many children.