

A Parastatal without Rubber Stamp

By Emmanuel Aziken

Emmanuel Aziken interrogates the claim by some critics that the 10th Senate has become a parastatal of the executive branch of government

It is remarkable that two of the most prominent political actors who topped the news this week on account of their blistering attacks on the performance indices of the Bola Tinubu administration were about the most energetic enablers of Asiwaju's presidential aspiration. Senator Ali Ndume was until this week, the Senate Chief Whip, and Comrade Salihu Lukman was also until recently, the national vice-chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress, APC.

Senator Ali Ndume apparently buoyed by Senator Kashim Shettima's influence in Borno, supported Tinubu's presidential aspiration and dynamically pushed for his victory in his Borno South senatorial district. Indeed, Senator Ndume followed up his support for Tinubu's successful presidential bid by also assuming the role of director-general of the campaign for Senator Godswill Akpabio's Senate Presidency project. It is worthy of note that it is almost the tradition that whosoever leads the successful campaign that brings in a new Senate President either gets the position of Senate Leader or chairmanship of a juicy committee, and notably, the Committee for Appropriations. In Ndume's case, he got neither. He was bested by Senator Opeyemi Bamidele as Senate Leader and then, by Senator Olamilekan Adeola for the position of Appropriations chairman. He was settled with the position of Senate Chief Whip, the number four position in the ruling party and then with the vice-chairmanship position in the Committee of Appropriations.

Was it at this point of losing those two positions that he became bitter? Or was it at the point of losing access to the president? Or even more pointing, was it at as he claimed in his own words when he discovered that the aides of the president were the least competent persons in the land?

Those are deep questions that demand much introspection. Remarkably, Ndume's campaign for Tinubu was against the desire of another prominent son of Borno South, Mr Daniel Bwala who had prior to the 2023 election forsworn Tinubu's presidential aspiration. Bwala's rejection of Tinubu was based on the Muslim-Muslim tilt that he saw as inconsiderate of a religious balance. Indeed, Bwala followed up by etching one of the most quoted lyrics regularly sung by the opposition that "human brains don't work when you join APC." A year after, Ndume who canvassed Tinubu has now been shuttled to Siberia with an open declaration that he could well leave his chilly political confinement for any other opposition party.

Meanwhile, Bwala after his tour of duty with the Atiku Abubakar campaign in the PDP has returned to the APC reaping

where he did not sow. Unlike Ndume who cannot get access, Bwala apparently gets access to Tinubu either in Nigeria or abroad. Senator Ndume in at least two blistering interviews reduced the Tinubu presidency to the unenviable bottom of being beyond comparison with the Muhammadu Buhari administration. According to him, that uninviting assessment arose from the emergence of a kakistocracy in the administration. For emphasis, a Kakistocracy refers to a government presided over by the worst and most incompetent persons in a country. This correspondent believes that the term may be too far-reaching and may only be parroted by the most extreme of Tinubu's critics. It, however, suffices that Ndume ordinarily as chief whip should not be a critic. Rather, as the chief whip of the Senate, he was to marshal senators towards the attainment of the party's positions on issues. Unfortunately, he was not able to do so, citing what he claims were the lack of access to the president. Whether he was too blunt in his assessment of the situation can only be judged by examining the efforts he made towards obtaining the required access. But it must be said that in a virile democracy that truly lives to its name the Chief Whip is a very sensitive position who commands the loyalty of lawmakers with his ability to apply the whip.

The letter dismissing Ndume as Chief Whip was authored by the national chairman of the APC, Dr Umar Ganduje and the national secretary, Senator Ajibola Basiru. Some have described the letter as indecorous on the claim that unelected political actors appear to have shoved away the two elected senators from their positions. It is quite shocking and a reflection of the low esteem that the Senate may have tumbled to in the present dispensation. It was in respect of that depiction that Comrade Salihu Lukman described the Senate under Senator Akpabio as a parastatal of the executive branch of government. Lukman, of course, has his own axe to grind with the APC. He resigned his position as National Vice Chairman of the party and subsequently dumped his membership of the party after venturing on the same issues as expressed by Ndume. Shockingly, the APC senate caucus has become a supple conclave shorn of institutional memory or its powers of articulation. It is unarguably on account of these letdowns that the former APC national vice-chairman, Lukan now refers to the 10th Senate as a parastatal of the administration. It is a term worse than the rubber stamp that was derisively etched on the Ahmad Lawan Senate.