

The Madness in the National Assembly

By Jibrin Ibrahim



The proof that madness is running wild in the National Assembly is that the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abbas Tajudeen could dare propose the contentious Counter Subversion Bill 2024. The proposed legislation sought, among other things; to impose a 10-year prison sentence or a fine of N5 million—or both—on Nigerians who refuse to recite the national anthem. The bill was introduced following the May 2024 decision by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to revert to Nigeria's old national anthem, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee," which was written by Lillian Jean Williams in 1959 and composed by Frances Berda. This decision itself had already stirred controversy, with many Nigerians questioning the rationale behind the change and expressing concerns about the anthem's colonial origins and language of tribes. Meanwhile, the old anthem was rediscovered and imposed on Nigerians without consultation or

debate. What they are telling Nigerians is that when they impose something, Nigerians must obey or be dealt with. The bill, sponsored by Speaker Abbas Tajudeen himself with the title Counter Subversion Bill and other related ones introduced on July 23, 2024, proposed severe penalties for anyone who refuses to recite the national anthem, destroys national symbols, or undermines the federal government. Additionally, it included punishments for defacing places of worship, setting up illegal roadblocks, and receiving foreign financial or political support that could compromise Nigeria's security and development.

The essence of the bill is provisions for fines and prison sentences for those who disobey or disrespect authority, organize unauthorized processions, or supported paramilitary or militia groups. It sought to criminalize

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activities that undermine national security and peaceful coexistence, with penalties ranging from fines of N3 million to N15 million and prison terms of up to 20 years. The idea is to criminalize all protests and opposition to government. The bill was clearly designed to end democracy in Nigeria following the success of the end bad governance ten-day demonstrations. How did they even think they could pass such a draconian bill in Nigeria? The Speaker had to withdraw it in a hurry to stop the next set of national protests starting earlier than planned.

Activists, such as Omoyele Sowore and Aisha Yesufu had strongly condemned the bill and Sowore had threatened a shutdown of the National Assembly if the bill was not withdrawn, while Yesufu declared she would rather face a 20-year prison sentence than sing the newly re-adopted national anthem, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee." The idea of equating disagreement with government with state subversion is the essence of fascism and it is concerning that the leadership of our National Assembly can even think about such an initiative. This is a National Assembly that has for decades refused to tell Nigerians the true amount they receive each month as salary and allowances. There was a breach in their armour of secrecy recently when Senator Abdulrahman Kawu Sumaila (NNPP, Kano), confirmed that he receives about N21+1 million monthly as his perquisite for representing the people of Kano South Senatorial District in the 10th National Assembly. He however said that he does not know how much goes to the Senate president, the deputy Senate

president, as well as each of the eight other principal officers of the upper chamber of the Nigerian parliament. The revelation by Kawu puts the total monthly package for all the 99 non-principal officers of the Senate at N2.079 billion.

The 10 principal officers of the 10th Senate are: President, Godswill Akpabio; Deputy President; Jibrin Barau; Majority Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele; Deputy Majority Leader, Lola Ashiru; Chief Whip, Tahir Monguno; Deputy Chief Whip, Nwebonyi Peter Onyeka; Minority Leader, Abba Moro; Deputy Minority Leader, Akogun Lere Oyewumi; Minority Whip, Osita Ngwu and Deputy Minority Whip, Rufai Hanga. In normal parliamentary systems, the earnings of members are public knowledge as they are available on the website of the organisations. If our National Assembly has made their earnings a secret, it is because they know some of the payments are illegal and they need to hide their criminality while they insist we call them honourable and distinguished Nigerians. We need to withdraw these labels from them. As former President Olusegun Obasanjo said recently, the federal lawmakers are acting immorally for fixing their remunerations themselves. At a time when the majority of Nigerians are suffering from multi-dimensional poverty and severe hunger, it is shocking that legislators believe they can continue to consume a considerable slice of the national budget.

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