

Shagari's Foes Consider Forming Coalition

[AN] Nigerian President Shehu Shagari and his ruling National Party (NPN) are increasingly worried about the 1983 elections following the January announcement of an "electoral alliance" among major opposition parties.

Speaking at the University of Jos in Plateau State recently, Shagari called for an "ethical revolution" and lashed out at those who continued to sow the seeds of disunity and political contention — a thinly-veiled reference to the more outspoken elements of the parliamentary opposition.

Previously, in a strictly political context, the Nigerian leader told an NPN convention that a merger among minority parties would constitute an "ill-motivated alliance and gang-up" posing dangers to "the stability and health development of our national policies."

Last month's Cabinet reshuffle was taken by many observers as an effort to displace the weaker personalities in the Federal ministries with an eye to the 1983 elections.

Many Nigerians, however, were reportedly disappointed at the lack of any major policy initiative to go along with the reshuffle.

The most significant personnel shift was the appointment of former Industries Minister Adamu Ciroma to head the Agriculture Ministry. The farm sector has been Shagari's top economic priority, and Ciroma, acclaimed for his efficiency, is most probably expected to produce at least one concrete achievement to which the government can point, come campaign time.

The strength of the challenge to Shagari's NPN depends largely on the outcome of negotiations now under way among the Unity Party (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and a dissident faction of the People's Redemption Party (PRP). Following a January meeting in Benin involving all four groups, UPN Senate leader Jonathan Odebiyi was made chairman of an inter-party committee to determine the shape of the alliance, but he has since gone on record as saying a genuine merger by 1983 was quite unlikely.

Speculation in the press, consequently, has focused on the prospect of limited electoral cooperation in which the opposition parties would support one presidential candidate. UPN leader Obafemi Awolowo, and possibly agree not to contest legislature seats likely to be won by other members of the coalition. As *West Africa* magazine observes, however, such an arrangement would imply that "each party will win its traditional stronghold and the political geography and climate of Nigeria will remain unchanged." Except, of course, that the NPN would likely suffer numerous setbacks.

Though the Nigerian constitution requires registered political parties to demonstrate support and to maintain offices in all parts of the country, regional and ethnic factors remained extremely important in the last election. The UPN is clearly strongest among the Yoruba (in the west); the NPP has an avid following among the Ibo (in the east); the PRP is most formidable in the north; and the GNPP ran strongest in the north and middle belt. The NPN, often labeled a party of businessmen and professionals, is considered more national in character, but it also enjoys firm support in the Islamic north.

Nigeria's "Second Republic" has undergone severe grow-

ing pains at times since the military handed over power to civilians in 1979, but some commentators argue that the traditional politics based on ethnicity and regional interest is slowly giving way to a politics based on ideology. The current merger negotiations provide a test for this theory.

The likeliest ideological partnership in the proposed alliance couples the UPN with the PRP dissidents. Awolowo's party, though far from a revolutionary socialist force, has laid claim to a "progressive" political label, putting forth as its basic program the provision of free education at all levels, free health care, integrated rural development and full employment. Similarly, the PRP's initial platform, considered by some the most radical manifesto, called for improved social services, the repeal of some traditional taxes on the peasantry and other economic changes to help the long-overlooked wage laborer and rural dweller.

While PRP leader Aminu Kano decided early on to refrain from confrontation tactics in dealing with the victorious NPN, many party radicals dissented, and in 1980 the PRP split.

Among the leaders of the PRP radical branch, which will be forced to re-register under a new name if it is to contest the 1983 elections, are the governor of Kano State, Muhammed Abubakar Rimi, and the former Governor of Kaduna, Balarabe Musa. Musa was impeached last June by the NPN-controlled state legislature, a showdown that deepened antipathy toward the ruling party and sowed the seeds of the new opposition front. Weeks later Kano Governor Rimi was shaken by a violent uprising in Kano city — something apparently triggered by the criticism his left-leaning administration addressed to the local emir.

The UPN's Awolowo and the PRP radicals tend to cast their criticism of Shagari and the NPN in class terms. "We must not underestimate the feudalist reactionaries who are now using the NPN as their rear guard platform," Awolowo told a party congress in December. "They obsessively believe that it is their destiny to rule... and they regard all others outside their class as serfs and underlings."

Kano governor Rimi saw the violence last July as proof that the north's traditional Muslim feudal establishment would balk at nothing in the effort to fend off forces of social change. "This terrible scandal," he says, "goes a long way to confirm the fear of the Nigerian populace about the partisan role of the police in propping up the NPN neofascist regime in our body politic."

The UPN and PRP dissidents have by no means worked out the specifics of a populist platform for 1983, however, and, even if they had, the rhetoric would probably be lost on the NPP and GNPP. Secretary General Alex Fom accuses the ruling party of being "shamelessly materialistic," but he also says that discussions on a "socialist" program for the opposition alliance would be a "waste of time." GNPP officials are likewise considered wedded to a middle-of-the-road, "pragmatic" approach.

Organizers of the anti-NPN coalition clearly have their work cut out in the months ahead, but even a modicum of success in coordinating electoral strategy and backing key candidates could damage Shagari's party. The NPN enjoyed a working legislative majority for a time, thanks

to a temporary alliance with the NPP, but it now controls roughly only forty per cent of the seats in each house, and the president is having a tough time with his legislation, as witness last year's revenue allocation dispute.

Ironically, even the government's Electoral Bill has been bogged down in numerous revisions, and Shagari recently addressed a letter to legislators asking that the bill be spared further amendments.

Ugandan Rebels Strike Kampala

[AN] Fighting returned to the Ugandan capital Kampala last week, as guerrillas trying to oust President Milton Obote launched attacks on army barracks and troop-carrying government vehicles, leaving more than 150 soldiers dead.

The barracks were attacked in the early hours of February 23, and the guerrillas reportedly captured a number of weapons from the army arsenal. Two days later, two trucks loaded with soldiers were reportedly destroyed within 25

kilometers (17 miles) of Kampala. In retaliation, government troops were said to be searching Kampala homes for suspected insurgents. A BBC correspondent in the city said at least forty civilians had been killed by the soldiers.

Responsibility for the attacks was claimed by the Uganda Freedom Movement, which joined other Obote opponents in the Uganda People's Front formed last month in London. The front was announced by two former presidents, God-

frey Binisa and Yusufu Lule, who served between the ouster of Idi Amin in 1979 and the election of Obote in December 1980.

The opponents accuse Obote of rigging the election with Tanzanian assistance. Tanzanian troops joined with a combined Ugandan opposition army to oust Amin, then stayed on to maintain stability until they were withdrawn last year.

Obote declared a New Year's amnesty and released thirty opposition politicians.

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