

International Forum

A Biafran Examines His War-Torn Land

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first article of a new Collegian feature, "International Forum." The "Forum" will present the views of international students on their homelands, the United States and the University. It is hoped that the "Forum" will stimulate an exchange between American and foreign students on campus. Letters to the Editor are welcomed on all "Forum" articles. Today, J. Obiukwu Duru, an agricultural engineering graduate student from Biafra, discusses the Nigerian-Biafran conflict.)

By J. OBIUKWU DURU

Biafra, formerly Eastern Nigeria, is the youngest nation in Africa. It lies in West Africa and is bordered by Cameroon on the east and the Bight of Biafra on the south. With the area of 29,484 miles and a population of 14 million people, it is the fifth most populous country in Africa.

But when did Biafra cease to be part of Nigeria? And why? To understand the answers to these questions would require some basic facts about Nigeria. In the real sense of the word, Nigeria has never been a country. It comprised people of different ethnic groups with clearly different cultures, languages, religions and highly suspicious of one another.

Northern Nigeria appeared to be the most uneasy in the Federation and had threatened time and again to secede. Its latest threat was that made by Maj. Gen. Y. Gowon when he became head of the Nigerian government in 1966. Northern Nigerians are also the most hostile tribe as demonstrated by the Kano riot of 1945, Jos riot of 1953, vandalism and gangsterism following the 1964 federal elections and the massacres of 1966. It is important to keep in mind that in all the cited cases, members of other groups were the victims.

That's Not All

But this was not all. The Nigerian civil government was overly corrupt. In January, 1966, there was an army coup that liberated the people from the hands of a few wealth-minded, unpatriotic politicians. This move was greeted with jubilation all over the country. The army that did the job was represented by members of all the regions in the country.

The coup claimed the lives of two Northern politicians, one Western, and one Mid-Western Nigerian in the civilian list. There were, in addition, deaths in the army rank following the disagreement between those who did and others who did not support the coup.

With time the Northerners interpreted the first coup as a plan masterminded by the Easterners in an attempt to dominate the country. The Northerners carried out another coup aimed at the Easterners, especially the Ibos of this region. This coup had peculiar characteristics that are rather interesting. It was the only coup carried out by the members of one region alone.

Also, by virtue of being an Easterner, one automatically became a candidate for death regardless of whether a person were

male or female, a politician or a civil servant, a child or an adult. Maj. Gen. Y. Gowon became head of the government by grace of this coup.

Things appeared to quiet down for a while. In July of the same year, just a month after the coup, Easterners were killed in the North. In September, the last sweep saw executions of the military and civilians alike. This claimed the lives of 50,000 Easterners, and sent two million others fleeing back to the East.

In case anybody has been made to believe that Easterners are secession-minded, it is significant to note that even at this stage there has been no talk of secession. But one thing is clear beyond a doubt. People of Eastern origin were not safe anywhere but in their own region. There were still desperate attempts to keep our pseudo-country together.

A Living Example

A living example of this was the conference by the regional leaders held in Aburi, Ghana in January, 1967. Conference members discussed plans to keep Nigeria together. Several agreements were reached including one that called for the federal government to help resettle the two million refugees who had lost their life possessions.

The date set for implementing the Aburi agreements came and passed. Nothing was done by the federal government which expressed neither sympathy to the wronged nor disapproval for the acts. Two conclusions were inescapable. Easterners were not safe to travel outside their region, and the federal government would not guarantee them justice or safety.

Assume Responsibility

The only alternative was for them to assume the responsibility to preserve their lives. This was the reason for breaking away from Nigeria. Biafra was born May 30, 1967.

Entirely because of economic reasons, Nigeria wants Biafra back. The only way it was to be done was by military action. Nigeria invaded Biafra on July 6, 1967. The war, designed to last 48 hours, is still on. Even during the course of the war, Nigeria has shown an astonishing amount of inconsistency and disunity. In the government's own words the war was a "surgical police action."

It happens now that the main targets are civilians as evidenced by repeated bombing of churches, hospitals, schools and market places. The war is supposed to be an internal affair. Nigeria has relied entirely on outsiders for money, arms and personnel. Nigeria claims Biafra as her own. But with the beginning of the civil war, all Biafrans were denied their federal government scholarships.

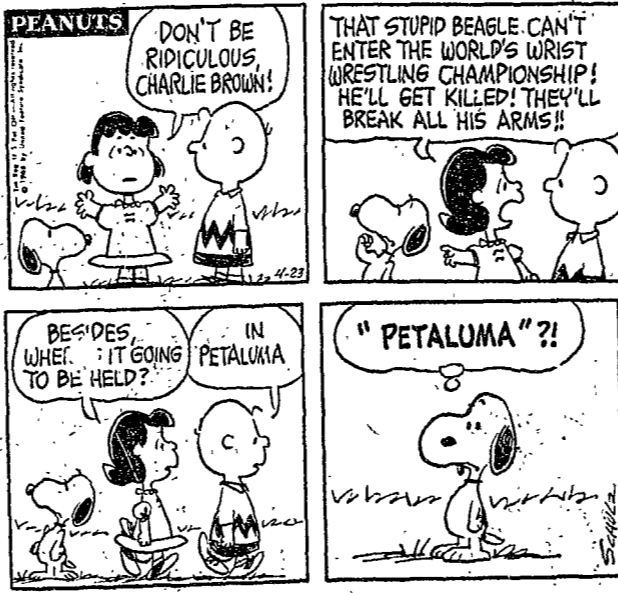
The outside world does not seem to want to do anything in the interest of human life. Those who do notice say that Biafra is setting a wave of Balkanization in Africa. But is this good enough a reason to justify what has proved to be genocide? Supporting genocide for fear of Balkanization seems to suggest that the important thing is to portion the African continent into land masses.

It does not matter whether men have ceased to exist on parts of this land. And when the people have disappeared, it is not important where they have gone or how or why. I cannot bring myself to agree with this.

If I have a choice between coming together and perishing and staying apart and surviving, I will choose the latter. If anybody feels otherwise, I will be very interested to hear his argument.



DURU



Letters to the Editor

We Want Democratic Elections

TO THE EDITOR: We are writing this letter, in a very angry frame of mind, over the comments made by Elections Commissioner Edward Dench concerning the elections in West Halls. Certainly Mr. Dench is a very capable man, but this time he seems to be very uninformed.

He claims that the Supreme Court did not try to refute the charges in the 8 (not 7) affidavits presented on behalf of C. Jay Hertzog. He also charges that M.R.C. had a hand in the election, and that this was an attack on him personally. Nothing can be further from the truth.

We were two who asked how to write in for Hertzog and were told by the people at the desk that they didn't know either. One of us was able to find the right lever, but the other wasn't that lucky. After spending 15 minutes in the booth, I got fed up and voted for someone else. Both of us practically live in Waring Hall, so we overheard many other people also ask. They were either told "We don't know", or were told to write the name in the big box. All votes in the big box, incidentally, were ruled invalid.

Not liking the situation, we agreed to come to the results to testify for Hertzog. There were 8 affidavits and 2 witnesses. But since it was 2 a.m., the Court decided to accept the affidavits and waived our statements. Mr. Dench should know this, because I personally talked to him in the hallway of the Ambassador building while waiting to speak.

All we ask for is a chance to have a truly democratic election in the way we have been fighting for, and for which reason the Elections Commission was set up in the first place.

Mr. Dench also said that night that no results would be announced so nothing could influence the new election. Why then did he make the statement about the other two candidates and their results? Is he now personally against Hertzog because of this? The idea of the whole new election is so that people will not have to settle for voting for their second choice like I had to do.

Barry Levin '70
William Peifer '71

Better To Buy Some Trash Cans

TO THE EDITOR: As a member of this year's graduating class and a firm believer in sunshine and the beautification of America and the Penn State campus, I would like to suggest a change in the senior class gift from a fountain (which would be nice, but a bit ostentatious) to trash cans for Old Main lawn.

I realize that this may sound a little absurd, but let's face it—wouldn't you rather grovelitz around on a clean Old Main lawn during Spring Term, than around a pool of water with pizza boxes and soda cans floating all over it? Just imagine the possibilities of such a project! USG could rally student participation by sponsoring a massive "Design a Beautiful Old Main Lawn Trash Can Contest" (after all, we don't want to replace the pizza boxes with old empty oil barrels, do we), and we would probably even have some extra money for some less important luxuries like books for the library or something!

Robert Pisilli '68

Womer Said It; USG Is a Farce

By DENNIS STIMELING

Collegian USG Reporter

In his successful campaign for the presidency of the Undergraduate Student Government, James Womer claimed that "USG is a farce." The past election debacle demonstrated that Womer knew what he was talking about.

During the campaign the actions of many persons involved in USG reflected the integrity and responsibility, or lack of these attributes, in the University's student government.

The entire idea of congressional elections during Spring Term is absurd. Although the USG constitution states that congressional vacancies incurred during the year shall be filled during Spring Term executive elections, this rule should be revised or repealed.

The congressmen who were elected in this week's election will not assume their new positions until the sixth week of this term. They will attend, at most, only three USG meetings during their term of office, which expires at the beginning of Fall Term.

The first of these meetings will be a "get acquainted" gathering, where virtually no business will be conducted. The second meeting may see some action, but probably none by the new congressmen who will be still "learning the ropes."

That will leave the last meeting of the year for these newly elected officials to accomplish something. This last meeting, however, has always been known as a "pat each other on the back" type of affair, because what few decisions are reached then cannot be pursued until next year.

Every congressional seat filled by last week's election will be contested again in the fall, as the USG constitution provides. In other words, those newly elected officials completed a time-consuming, costly campaign for three weeks for virtually nothing. Each of them must repeat the same procedure in the fall if he wishes to serve USG next year.

During the present year, seven congressional vacancies occurred. These seats were all filled by special appointments made by the USG president. It would have been logical to allow these now-experienced congressmen to serve until the year's end, rather than hold elections for a three or four-week term of office.

If this were done, USG might accomplish something in the Spring Term, rather than become stagnant. Turning to the actual campaign, we see how various persons contributed further to the debasement of USG in the eyes of the students and the Administration.

First is Jeff Long, past president of the student government. The University Senate stipulates that no student on academic probation should be allowed to participate or hold office in any campus organization.

Because of this, a former congressman could not retain his seat, due to his being placed on the probation list.

At the same time, Long was allowed to remain in the position of president, in spite of his being placed on probation. Long should have resigned his position three weeks ago, before the election began.

Long's reasons for not resigning are cloudy. He may have wanted to retain the office to lend some credence to his campaign endorsements, or he may have simply wanted to prevent the usurpation of the office by vice president Jon Fox. This would have given Fox added publicity, possibly enough to have reversed the election result.

Long himself did not offer either of these reasons. He simply said, "I do not consider my probation as official." He is probably the only member of USG or the University who would take that preposterous stand.

In addition, at the last regular USG meeting, Long appointed a new Supreme Court chief justice to replace Dan Clements, whose term soon expires. This appointment traditionally has been the prerogative of the incoming USG president, since the present chief justice's term does not expire until after the new president has assumed office.

Long said that he made the appointment "to remove this position from the realm of politics." By doing this, he instead directly involved the situation in the middle of a political squabble. Long must have known this, and probably had other reasons for the appointment.

Rich Tobin, past treasurer of USG, also made a contribution to the banality of the past campaign. Tobin publicly endorsed several New Party candidates, while denying that the party of the candidates had anything to do with his decisions.

Tobin, as well as Long, was elected on the New Party ticket last year, and this year was a registered member of the organization. In fact, one of the candidates he endorsed had also been nominated by him at the party convention.

Tobin actively campaigned for several candidates in the election. At the same time, he was partly responsible for maintaining records of campaign expenditures of all candidates.

For Tobin to have campaigned or even have supported a candidate and also help decide whether that campaign was honest is an obvious conflict of interest. It is just one more example of the folly within USG.

Turning now to the Elections Commission itself, we find examples of campaign disorganization and inaccuracy. First, because of the failure of commission pollsters to provide information on write-in instructions, the Supreme Court has decided that the West Halls congressional race has been discounted and must be run again.

For a number of students, the major proof of voting was a pencil mark placed on a student activities card by the pollsters. This mark proved to be easily erasable, thereby allowing the holder to vote more than once, placing the elections' results in doubt.

The USG executives, the Supreme Court and the Elections Commission were all involved in what may be the biggest step backward for student government at the University.

Unfairness and impropriety in an election can only lead to the same mistakes within the government. Penn State lost much in this election, not because of the results, but because of the techniques used to produce those results.

It may not take Jim Womer long to realize that his campaign statement is truer than even he realized. He made the change, and it has been substantiated. Now it will be up to him to try to do something about it. It may be a long, hard and fruitless effort.



STIMELING

SIMON and GARFUNKEL

appearing in the



USG SPRING WEEK

ARTS FESTIVAL

May 5th

8:30 p.m.

Rec Hall

\$2.50

Block Sale

April 24th

(Minimum Order of 20)

General Sale

April 25

Ground Floor HUB

--- An FMK Production ---