

GOOD LIVING OF THE PEOPLE AS THE MEASURE OF GOOD POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

Joachim Ireruke Ukutsemuya
Email: Ukutsemuya@gmail.com; Phone: 08037917080

Abstract

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke made us understand that human existence has obstacles to living the good life. Political leadership in the society is essentially about eliminating these obstacles in order to make possible the good life. The experience in Nigeria has been one of leaders having the good life while the led wallowed in hardship and misery. This is to the extent that there is almost the belief that good political leadership can exist without making positive impact on the lives of the people. Employing the philosophical method of hermeneutics, this study submits that good political leadership is in upgrading of the standard of living of the people who elected the leaders.

Keywords: Society, Measure, Good political leadership, improvement of living and the people

Introduction

The rate at which politicians appear in places with great confidence like everything is well with their functions and duties is of great concern to thinking minds. They show up in public with their convoys of brand new vehicles and accompanying close associates all in top and great forms. This situation contrasts with the living condition of those these politicians are supposed to be serving, who look miserable because of the hardship of life that is their lot. As their politicians who are their servants are cruising in the best of life devoid of any inkling of their suffering, the people merely look on at state operators who clearly live in a different world from their own. This write-up is meant to x-ray the essence of the state where politicians are employed. By the x-ray, in which the right purpose and functions of politicians are brought out, a change of attitude is expected from politicians, the servants of the people who in turn could bring a different state of living, that is, upgrade in the good life for the people in the state.

Understanding the Origin of the State

If the origin of a thing is known, it becomes easy to understand its essence which provides ground for its fruitful assessment in terms of its purpose. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are two Philosophers who provide us with the origin of the state in a fashion that enable us to assess the performance of the state in order to continue to point the ideal direction that

the state should be going. Thomas Hobbes¹ imagined a state of nature as the first state of existence as humans where there was no ruler in form of government. It was survival of the fittest. Anybody could come for you and your property, just as you could go for anybody and his property. If you are able to overcome him, his property becomes yours. However, if he is able to put you in check, your property becomes his. It was a situation of all against all. Living here, Hobbes says is brutish, short and nasty.

Having seen that such a brutish, short and nasty life is not to be desired, Hobbes noted that humans decided to form a super human known as Leviathan² to whom all decided to submit their rights and whom all must listen to and obey. Failure of any person to follow the directive of this super human the person is to be punished. This super human in turn is to regulate the living of humans and eliminate lawlessness, the war of all against all in the state of nature. Thus this super human is to protect lives and property for the benefit of all.

Humans agreeing to organize their lives by forming sovereignty, a super human with all powers to main laws and order for more life for all in the society in the state of nature becomes rationally the origin of the state as we have it. In John Locke's³ state of nature, he imagined individuals who were free and lived their lives in dignity and with great capacity of reason. These individuals through their reason noted that they cannot live on their own at the individual level. There is therefore the need to form a society and with all to submit their rights to a super human who will regulate the activities of the individuals coming to live together for the purpose of abundance of life for all. In this way we have the origin of the state to enable people live together for the purpose of co-operation to ensure abundance of life.

It is noteworthy that in Hobbes' state of nature, subjects are not to question the super human (the state). They are just to follow his directives that should bring about the protection of lives and properties and to eventually eliminate the nasty, brutish and short life condition in state of nature. In Locke's state of nature on the other hand, the super human (the State) could be challenged should there be a digression in his function of existing for the co-operation of free and dignified individuals for the purpose of more life, indeed abundance of life for the entire body.

The state of nature may have been criticized as what did not happen in actual existence of the human person; that it was just an imagination in the human person. It nevertheless cannot be denied as what provides a rational and ideal x-ray for understanding of the modern state in its essence and purpose. The operators of modern state are accountable to the people they lead. This is the reason the people, the led, can hold to account their leaders. The operators of state, as the theory of state of nature corroborates, are at best servants of the people whom they serve towards more life, to provide better life in protection of lives and property and organization of individuals to bring abundance of life for all in the society.

Usually, through elections, the operators of state, known as politicians are recruited and

employed for services in the leviathan, the state to serve the people in the task of ensuring better existence in quality life.

The State and the Nigerian Situation

Essentially from above we have the rational basis for the state. The state basically exists to serve the people through its nature to protect lives, property and indeed make life to be more for the people. We understand this about the state from the need to eliminate the brutish, short and nasty life that characterized life in the state of nature leading to the formation of the Leviathan to sanitize situation and bring about a better form of existence. Locke's state of nature even refines the purpose of the state further to not only ensure protection of lives and property but also bring about the good life through the individuals who come together in it for co-operation that will make existence more robust by what they can achieve as a whole and together and not as individuals.

But what do we rather have in the political sphere in Nigeria? We have politicians or state operators who serve their own interests instead of the interest of the people. The state from its origin that is meant to serve the interest of the people has been turned into an invention taking care of only the interest of state operators, their families and close associates.

Looking closely at the operations of the state one gets the impression that the state exists to protect its operators, that is the politicians against its people. In this manner you find politicians and their cronies all around increasing in their private empires and looking so healthy together with their families and with convoys of brand new cars when they move around. Indeed, for these operators of state, it is abundance of life unending.⁴

On the other hand, for the led, it seems to be suffering unending! You see this misery literally written on the faces of the led. This pain used to be medium in scale in the past. But recently it has become maximum in health services; in the educational sector with students in and out of schools; banking sector that should ensure ease in financial transactions has become a nightmare; in energy, while the operators of electricity are doing their worse, one on the other hand is wondering whether oil and gas in the nation is really a blessing; you groan to buy each of these; even when one is ready to buy at exorbitant prices they are, you go through hell to eventually buy them; the queues sometimes for fuel are not to be talked about; what about the funds of the state? They are never truly enjoyed by the people! Life indeed is fast slipping into the one obtainable in state of nature. For the insecurity in the land, one sometimes feels that life is now brutish, short and nasty. Yet the state operators continue to do well for themselves, families and close associates to the grave neglect of the people for which the state should be existing to eliminate all on the way to the good life for them.⁵

Therefore, there is an abnormal situation. The situation of a state that is supposed to make life better for the people now serving all that make life difficult and miserable for the people! It is time to remind our politicians and state operators that the measure of good

political leadership that they are supposed to be offering is not in how big their private empires are! It is rather in how much of good life the people have because of their services through the state? This is so because the state exists to provide a servant figure for the people, to be served in protection of their lives and property and provision of abundance of life as a whole. Anything other than these, contradicts the very existence of the state and politicians who are operators of the state.⁶

Conclusion

It is true that to emerge as the one to control the state and its resources, requires keen competition. However, the competition is not some abstract fight. It is a competition to get the people to endorse your ideas on how you are to use the state to serve them. When one eventually emerges as a winner of this competition through election by the people, he/she is now to settle down to use the state apparatus to serve the people in the endorsed ideas by the people. In this way, you operate as a politician in a fashion that is harmonious with the purpose of the establishment of the state.⁷ Thus, you become intellectual as well as a politician and all adds to the glory of humanity, the ultimate goal in service.

Recommendations

1. The state is an apparatus of service to the people. It exists solely for the purpose of upgrading the quality of living of the people. The state in other words is positioned only for the aim of improving the life of the people. Consequently, the operators of the state, that is politicians must use it only for this purpose
2. The whole idea of struggling for the power of the state to be used for selfish ends, serving the personal purpose of office holders is abnormal and contradicts the essence and purpose of the state. The state and its structures can only be used to serve the common good of all in the state
3. Only the people of the state have the right to choose those to operate the state. Nobody should force himself/herself on the people of the state. The people choose their leaders by choosing the ideas that politicians exhibit at electoral campaigns. The chosen is the idea and person they want in their state. Using violence to come into state power is therefore an aberration that must be resisted as it is against what the state stands for.
4. Being a state officer at all levels amounts to being a servant of the people. Being a politician and being pompous and arrogant therefore are contradictory. Reason being that the politician is a servant of the people who is ready to do the bidding of the people as it upgrades their lives in the good life.

5. It also follows that the politician cannot be the only one having the good life in the state. If this happens, there is something wrong. He is supposed to be working to improve the life of the people. If he is the only one driving the to the good cars and having the best of clothing, he/she has to look carefully at the services he/she is rendering state!

References

1. Warburton, N. 1998. "Thomas Hobbes leviathan" *Philosophy the Classics*. London: Routledge, Pp. 45-54
2. Ibid.
3. Warburton, N. 1998. "John Locke Second Treatise of Government" Op. Cit. Pp.67- 75
4. Nigerian politicians interested in enriching themselves, retrieved from <https://punchng.com> on 21/4/23
5. Nigeria returning to a state of nature, retrieved from <https://guardian.ng> on 21/4/2023
6. Where are the ideas that matter in today's politics?, retrieved from <https://businessday.ng> on 21/4/2023
7. Onwe, S.P., "An examination of Good Governance and The State of Security in Nigeria". *Philosophy and National Security, interrogations in a Distressed Nation* edited by ihuah, A. et al. Vol.1, 2021. Pp.29-30