Victors as Victims

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The people of the south-west have put the rest of us to shame with their principled defence of the sanctity of their vote and the legitimacy of their political choice. It is clear they never accepted the PDP.

There is a sense in which it makes sense to rhapsodise the electoral victories of Kayode Fayemi and Rauf Aregbesola, the new governors of Ekiti and Osun respectively, as indeed, several people have done. It makes sense to interpret them as hopeful signs that some elements in the Nigerian judiciary fear God more and Mammon less. Or, to put it another way, it is good to see that despite its pervasiveness even in the hallowed temple of justice, not all Nigerians have lost their conscience in the cesspool of corruption. This interpretation is, of course, simplistic. But it fuels the sustained euphoria in the wake of the verdict of the court of appeal that put paid to the shenanigans that kept the usurpers in power and the choice of the people in limbo. Ekiti and Osun are not enough evidence that our judiciary has now ceased to be an invertebrate respecter of the rich and the powerful. It would be naïve, foolish even, to jump to such a conclusion. We have not seen, and we are not likely to see, the end of transparent influence of money in judicial decisions, particularly in election cases. As long as the sun rises from the east and sets in the west so long will there be honest judges who remain true to their conscience and the sanctity of their oath of office and crooked judges who go weak in the knees at the sight of the contents of Ghana-must-go bags and inflict on themselves the shame of dishonest judgements. And thanks to such judges, many state governors and tens of legislators at the state and national assemblies who were roundly rejected by their own people, remain in office and continue to insult God by claiming he gave them victory. The time it took to end the nonsense in the two states prove that the manipulation of political cases is disturbingly entrenched in the labyrinthine judicial system. It took Fayemi 42 months and Aregbesola 43 months to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. Justice was delayed but it was not denied them. And for that, we celebrate; not because we now believe that the judiciary has found its groove and the courage to do what is right for the right reasons but because when all is almost lost, whatever is salvaged is reason enough to entertain some hope, even if fleetingly, for a better future for the rule of law and the inviolable and absolute right of the people to choose their representatives in government. Their lordships in the appeal court, Ibadan, deserve commendation for coming at last to the rescue of the people of Ekiti and Osun states whose right to choose was denied them by crooked elements in the electoral commission and sustained until now by the judiciary. Still, there is some sense in which our celebration of these and similar judgements in electoral cases says more about the state of our collective helplessness and less about the presumed resurgence of courage in the judiciary. Here are some fundamental points we need to note. The first point is that the aberration has become the norm and the norm an aberration in our country. When a court gives the right judgement in an electoral case, we hail it because we see it as a breach in the well-guarded culture of aberration – evidence in ecclesiastic terms that not all those who steal in the name of the lord sit pretty. It is all we can do to welcome such an exception to the extant aberrant rule we have been conditioned to accept as the divine order in favour of the scoundrels taking the name of the Lord in vain. The second point is that although our trust in the judiciary as the last refuge of the cheat is unarguably rusty, our capacity for defending our legitimate rights is impaired by the doctrine of personal survival which stipulates that it is unwise to put your head on the chopping block. If the result of an election is at variant with our collective decision, we put it down to the ways of political mathematics that pass all understanding. We forget, thanks to the doctrine of survival, that the right to vote carries with it the obligation on the part of the voters to defend the sanctity of their choice. The people of old Ondo State exercised their right and their obligation in the 1983 governorship election in the state. FEDECO said they voted in Akin Omoboriowo as their governor; the people said they voted in Michael Ajasin for a second term in office. They did not wait for the election tribunal to take them round the bend for 43 months. Their will prevailed. But that was then. Segun Oni and Olagunsoye Oyinlola sat on the stolen throne in Ekiti and Osun states respectively for so long because the people were themselves complicit in their exercise of the stolen mandate. The third point is that given our supercilious indulgence in the God talk, we are made impotent by our belief that hell fire awaits those who steal the people’s mandate and in diverse ways cheat them. I should think that it is the business of God to prevent people from stealing the people’s mandate in the first place. It does not make much sense to me that he would allow people to steal for no better reason than the cynical pleasure of seeing them roast in hell fire for ever. How does that help the victims of serial rigging and cash-and-carry justice? The fourth point is that the people of the south-west have put the rest of us to shame with their principled defence of the sanctity of their vote and the legitimacy of their political choice. It is clear they never accepted the PDP. They were corralled into it in 2003. Their decision to break loose in 2007 was temporarily, as it has now turned out, delayed. With their original party, AD, gone after the 2003 tsunami, they opted for ACN. Its control of the former Western Region will, I verily hope, end the one-party system we don’t need. SMS: 08055001912