Orji’s Backward Policy

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This sword of non-indegene policy which is threatening to divide us must be uprooted soonest so that Ojukwu's spirit can rest in perfect peace

It is very hard to believe that the Abia State non-indigene policy in this 21st century was an idea sold to the governor by unimaginative advisers who thought that an archaic, divisive measure was the best approach to solving the financial problem of the state. I say this because Governor Theodore Orji said last week, in Lagos, that it was his advisers who gave him the idea of non indigene policy as a means of reducing the work force and meeting the financial obligations to its workers. Until the governor’s statement that begs belief, I had restrained myself from joining in the hue over the non indigene nonsensical debate for various reasons. First, I did not want to draw more attention to the embarrassing issue while hoping that the Abia State government will, like a gentleman, take a noble cause by reversing the policy – a mistake it inflicted on itself. Two, I was equally hoping that the South-East Governors’ Forum would have talked sense into their renegade member who is trying, by all possible means, to divide the Igbo and make us the laughing stock of other tribes. Three, I had hoped against hope that Ohaneze, the apex Igbo umbrella body, and all the traditional institutions in Igbo land, will get the government of Abia State to realise the futility of its action and to back track. I did not want to join issues but was moved to do so after reading the lame duck excuse that Orji gave for implementing the non – indigene policy. The governor at the 5th Abia Think Tank Annual Forum Lecture in Lagos, said if his administration had not taken the decision, the state would have been in a financial mess. The question is, has the implementation of the policy improved the finances of the state? Orji said his government spends N3.2 billion income per month on salaries alone and wondered how he could take care of capital projects. “From the federation account, the highest we receive is N3.2billion. The figures are there every month. The internally-generated revenue I met was N150 million but we are now going to N400 million. When we use N1.8 billion to pay salaries, how much remains? And you know how much it takes to tar a kilometre of road. At the end of the month, you are left with virtually nothing to run government. And this brings us to this indigenisation.” He continued: “I did not propose minimum wage. It was proposed and all the states bought into it to pay N18,000. Everybody agreed. You can’t go there and say you will not pay; if you come home the workers will stone you to death. When I came back, I called my people to give me an idea on what to do. They said we should try to send some people away so that we can manage and pay this money. That was how it started.” According to the governor, “it was a very difficult decision to take. I think you people should be praising me for taking that decision. I did it to ensure that my people are happy. My primary assignment is to Abia State before any other state.” What an irony, a fallacy? What a myopic way of trying to defend the indefensible. This same policy is making everybody annoyed. No doubt, Orji wants to be pitied. He had been receiving well deserved knocks from all quarters. That is the first proof that the policy is anti-people. Surprisingly, even some of his officials do not support this policy. But they would not be man enough to tell Orji to his face. It is also clear that the governor did not think through the advise he was given and its implication before hurriedly implementing it. If he did, he would have known that it is a very bad and unacceptable policy that will surely boomerang. Nobody with any sense of justice and fairness, should pity him for boxing himself into this kind of policy quagmire that has robbed him the goodwill of his people. There is nowhere it is stated that a governor can meet the expectation of his people by doing the wrong thing. The governor ought to know that his action is already causing disaffection among Igbo, especially between Abia couples whose wives are from states other than Abia and have been working in the state for more than thirteen years. For these class of civil servants who have contributed to the development by paying taxes to the state, it can only be a nightmare to wake up one morning and be told they are no longer from the state even if they are married to Abia men. Some of those affected must have voted for Orji during the elections. Most of the indigenes of Abia State from all walks of life I have met are appalled by Orji’s action. Most do not support this divisive policy which cannot stand the test of time. When the military administrators who were not Igbo came up with the same idiotic policy, everybody believed they wanted to apply the divide and rule tactic to make Igbo perpetually suspicious of one another. In fact, it is on record that Chimaroke Nnanami, former governor of Enugu State, stopped the policy in Enugu State immediately the military handed over power to him. Nnamani went further to recall those who were sacked and even employed not only Igbo from other states but even non Igbo in the State’s civil service. I still recall what he said that Enugu is the capital of the former Eastern region and that any Igbo person must find solace when they come to the state. I believe that he threw the non-indigene policy into a bottomless pit where it belonged because of his belief in the unity and oneness of the Igbo people. In doing that, Nnamani proved beyond reasonable doubt that he is Nwa afo Igbo. Orji must prove to the Igbo that he is not working for the external interest of those who deride and hate the Igbo for no just cause. Did Orji say funding was the main reason behind his action? Yes, he did and he listed what he spends his money on. But he did not tell us how much he spends on some frivolous activities which will not yield any dividend to the people of Abia. How much does he spend in hosting government sponsored parties, trips abroad in search of non existent investors who will not come because of the precarious security situation in the state? How much have government officials cornered from the state budget as security vote? I could wager a bet that the security vote is 10 times more than what government claims to use to pay salaries. If the governor is all that transparent as he has shown by readily letting us know how much he pays as salaries, he should go on and spill the whole beans. Tell us what your security vote is and what and what you have used it to do. Afterall, Abia remains precarious as far as security situation is

concerned. In addition to ugly security in the state, it is even the dirtiest of all the states in the country. The major roads and those in the hinterlands are impassable. Even in Aba, the commercial nerve centre, heaps of refuse are everywhere blocking the roads and stinking to high heavens. Simple planning on engaging the youths could help to keep the streets of the state clean. Keeping the states clean will help in generating revenue from the public by insisting that they pay sanitation fees which I think they will willingly oblige should they see that government is, indeed, keeping the streets clean. Orji should be worried about how posterity will judge a man who put a sword in the very thing that held the Igbo together or be remembered as a man who worked to unite the race to fortify them for the greater battle to stop their maginalisation in the country as a whole. Which is it going to be? Orji must decide. However, there is no point in flogging a dead horse, but I do know that the Abia State government could use the opportunity provided by the death of Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the foremost leader of Ndigbo, which has become a rallying point for all Igbo, to abrogate this obnoxious non-indigene policy. If Ojukwu were in the country and in good health when this policy was announced, he would surely have spoken against it. He stood for us, fought for us and wished the Igbos will remain united. This sword of non-indigene policy which is threatening to divide us must be uprooted soonest so that Ojukwu’s spirit can rest in perfect peace. SMS: 08052528603