



Re-Thinking the Tenability of Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism

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Review Article

Volume 6 Issue 3

Received Date: October 05, 2023

Published Date: December 07, 2023

DOI: [10.23880/phij-16000309](https://doi.org/10.23880/phij-16000309)

Abstract

More than half a century after Nigeria (like most African nations) gained Independence; there has been a lingering problem of finding a socio-political ideology that would suit perfectly with the peculiar nature of African traditions. Incidentally, it is this same problem that led African thinkers to start propounding socio-political ideologies. These include Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Modibo Keita, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, and Nnamdi Azikiwe. The latter propose what he called Neo-Welfarism. A theory which has faced severe criticism over the years. This work has two goals: to identify the criticisms against Nnamdi Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism and re-examine them; and to show how Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism could be suitable for tackling the socio-political and economic challenges of contemporary Nigeria. The paper maintains that despite some flaws, Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism still holds certain credible principles which when properly applied, could be beneficial to the Nigerian society, and Africa at large.

Keywords: Neo-Welfarism; Ideology; Socialism; Capitalism; Socio-Political

Introduction

The problem of finding the right ideology that will lead to Africa's socio-political and economic liberation took centre stage from the end of the colonial era and has continued to be a major problem given the fact that most African countries are still under the yoke of neo-colonialism. Early solutions to the problem took the form of attempts by African thinkers to modify Western ideologies to suit their societies. According to Onyeaghalaji, African social and political thinkers were not reluctant to borrow foreign ideology, often uncritically, and give them African slant or even claim that they are supported by traditional African culture. In all, they put forward what they considered their personal ideologies for African political liberation and economic independence (250).

Nnamdi Azikiwe was not left out in this regard, however, his theory lays no false or hasty claim of being

similar to African traditions. Rather, it is a pensive effort to blend the Western (socialism and welfarism) with African communalism; and an unravelling of an appropriate ideology that would guide social, political, and economic policies. He argued for pragmatic federalism, neo-welfarism and the establishment of democratic institutions. His view was founded on his belief that only these would make the nation a true democracy, one where all would enjoy freedom and well-being [1].

More so, the so-called democratic era of Nigeria, beginning from the start of the Fourth Republic, has led many scholars to focus on evaluation of its practice and less on the fact that most political parties lack an operational ideology in the first place. Thus, in Nigeria, over half a century later after independence, the search for an ideology that will drive the nation forward is still on. Unfortunately, the quest seems to have ended. Yet even the much-touted Western democracy

has failed to bear any meaningful fruits for the common man.

One way out of this quagmire is to keep digging with the hope of creating a new ideology, and the other way out is to revisit the ideologies that were proposed earlier to see if any might still hold water after all. In this light, this paper seeks to fall back and re-examine Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism as a possible candidate for a socio-political and economic system which may save the country from its current state of statelessness. So, this paper contains the historical background that influenced Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism; an exposition of Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism, and the criticisms levelled against it. Further, it contains a critique of the criticisms against Neo-Welfarism; and finally shows how exactly this ideology could work for the benefit of present-day Nigeria.

The Historical Backdrop to Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism

Neo-welfarism is a humanist socio-political ideology which aspires to the establishment of a humane society where there can be abundance and where the state would guarantee for every citizen a reasonable minimum standard of living. Furthermore, the neo-welfarist state as envisaged would ensure that man's exploitation and dehumanization by his kind is brought to a minimal level, if not totally eradicated.

One may not detach the humanistic nature of Neo-welfarism as envisaged from the fact that it is rooted in "the Nigeria's indigenous mores", which are communalistic and harbour sentiments of concern and care for fellow man. This is a major substance in Neo-welfarism worthy of acknowledgement [2]. Obviously, Azikiwe's key assumption is that the political system of traditional Africa is a blend of capitalism and socialism [3]. For him, any Nigerian ideology should take cognizance of this. According to Omoregbe, Azikiwe was convinced that:

Our ancestors had a political ideology and we should go back to it. Politically they were welfarist, they shared things together. They had land in common; they were their brother's keepers. There were no cases of some people being extremely poor in the same society. It was a blend of capitalism and socialism and it avoided the evils of capitalism. That is the system we need in Africa we should adopt it and modernize it as 'neo-welfarism' (165-166).

Azikiwe also believed Africans have been caught in a web of alien ideologies, from which we must escape:

We are confronted with problems of co-existence and are ensconced in a wilderness of alien ideologies, which are making a terrific impact on our ways of life... we must dig

deep from our roots to discover this secret of successful co-existence (106-107).

By implication, the above information presents neo-welfarism as a revolutionary ideal of human equality, human dignity, love, respect, and care for one another. These values are inherent in traditional Nigerian ethos. It further means that in a Neo-welfarist state, the government shall not be above the law; and human rights shall be respected and guaranteed [4].

From the above, it is clear to see that Nigerian democracy is at variance with the tenets of Neo-welfarism as extolled by Azikiwe. The political elite and their cronies engage in corruption, misappropriation of public funds, nepotism, disregard for human rights, violations of the rule of law. Worse still is the impunity with which they practice these evil acts. It reflects an acute crisis of moral values, indigenous ethics, and communalism.

In his day, Azikiwe observed the lack of moral values among the political class and their followers. Electoral rigging, bribery and corruption, embezzlement and all the other vices listed earlier were quite noticeable in the first republic as they are today, the only difference being that the prevalence was less. Again, political parties were operating without any ideology. These were the factors that prompted Azikiwe to seek for an ideology that would place Nigerian democracy on the right path; where probity, accountability, morality, and brotherly love would be the order of the day. These time-honoured virtues occupy a prominent position in Azikiwe's proposal for the neo-welfarism (131-132).

Nnamdi Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism

Azikiwe began his political philosophy, which later culminated into Neo-welfarism as an ideology by examining the credibility and workability of three Western ideologies: Socialism, Welfarism, and Capitalism. From this critical analysis, he envisioned the possibility of taking the best aspects of these three socio-political systems to forge a new system for Nigeria. This system is what he called Neo-welfarism. Onyeaghalaji observes that "Azikiwe made a study of these ideological formulations and decided that the most appropriate for human survival is Neo-welfarism" (251).

Azikiwe himself took pains to explain and define the ideology he was putting forth at that time. According to him:

Neo-welfarism is an economic system which blends the essential elements of capitalism, socialism and Welfarism in a social-economic matrix, influenced by indigenous Nigerian mores, to enable the state and the private sector to own and control the means of production, distribution and

exchange, while simultaneously enabling the state to assume responsibility for the social services, in order to benefit the citizens according to their needs and officially specify minimum standards, without prejudices to participation in any aspect of the social services by voluntary agencies (10).

He further argues that Neo-welfarism is a “vernal and dynamic interpretation of Welfarism and its synchronization into a social matrix of the best elements in the universally recognized ideologies of Capitalism, Socialism and Welfarism” (127).

Again, Neo-welfarism is a new form or type of Welfarism which seeks to assign the state’s primary role of providing Welfare packages for the state. It is a complex system which proposes that the state should take responsibility for providing such welfare packages like housing, healthcare, transport, and social security, as well as a guarantee of human rights (153).

Agreeing with the above view, Ikechukwu has noted that “Azikiwe saw Neo-Welfarism as an ideology re-oriented and truly Nigerian, manifesting the Nigerian qualities: democratic according to her institutions, Welfarist in her economic background, altruistic in her sociological life and religiously animist” (28).

According to Azikiwe, Neo-welfarism as a system of government which is eclectic and pragmatic, a synthesis of rationalism and empiricism; incorporating into itself the utilitarian and practical elements of capitalism, socialism and welfarism (10). Commenting on Azikiwe’s Neo-Welfarism, Onyeaghalaji asserted that the basic elements of Azikiwe’s Neo-welfarism were Western and eclectic-taken from capitalism, socialism and welfarism. Yet the Western origins of his ideology did not deter him. What mattered to him was the whether it could be adapted to suit the Nigerian society. He believed that Neo-Welfarism synchronizes with the nature of the indigenous African society. He believed that indigenous Nigerian societies were communal in nature, Capitalist in the content, and democratic in the procedure. He argued that in Nigeria, public matters were democratically decided where people’s opinions were given equal consideration. Again, communalism was based on landed peasantry which underscores trade by barter. He was of the view that the presupposition of Neo-Welfarism was “necessary for social order and development in Nigeria” (252).

In Azikiwe’s view, a neo-welfarist state should be able to create viable conditions for the thriving of democratic principles. It should cooperate with external powers to develop and exploit the manpower, natural resources for mutual advantage. A neo-welfarists state should be able to put in place socio-political structures that would make it

possible for the realization of political freedom and economic security (279).

It was with these issues in mind that Azikiwe outlined what he thought were the primary objectives of Neo-welfarism:

- To reform and renew the instruments of power according to the Nigerian political experience;
- To insist on the rule of law;
- To bring about a total restoration and reinforcement of the fundamental rights of all citizens according to the Constitution;
- To bring into reality, the universally accepted principles of the separation of power between the Executive, Legislative and the Judiciary;
- To bring about the renewal of confidence in the integrity of government;
- To bring about a sincere and reliable organization and administration of public utilities, welfare services, education, agriculture, recreational facilities, and entertainment;
- To introduce an open-door policy in the importation and exportation of products, and
- To introduce and sustain a taxation policy that would be in accord with a reasonable scale (129-131).

Besides the above, there are other fundamental assumptions of Neo-welfarism which can be inferred from Azikiwe’s thought:

- That reality is many-sided and can best be apprehended by a receptive broad mind which sifts and harmonizes the various facets of reality yielded by experience and reason [5].
- That the truth of any proposition is determined with reference to its practicality and usefulness. Truth is neither absolute nor static such that it can be discovered once and for all, rather, it is ever emerging, and constantly being revealed through sense experience and reason (165).
- All existing socio-political philosophies embody some truth but not the whole truth about socio-political matters. However, the truth contained in each socio-political philosophy may be embedded in some chaff and thus needs to be sifted and harmonized with the truth disclosed in others for the benefit of mankind.
- The method of sifting some truths embedded in some socio-political philosophy is eclectic and pragmatic. This method promises to give a more adequate view of reality in general and socio-political matters, than any other.
- Neo-welfarism presupposes that socio-political philosophy is dynamic just as the phenomenon with which it deals (154). Thus, as assumption (ii) above suggests, no socio-political philosophy can be valid in all places, but would need to be reconstructed to meet

emergent truths and the new situations unfolded by experience and reason.

- Neo-welfarism also presupposes the possibility of perfecting social systems through an experimental and integrative approach. Hence, it purports to integrate those aspects of any system which are shown to be practicable and useful [6].

Regarding the economic aim of neo-welfarism, Azikiwe avers that it makes for “an abundant society, organized on the basis of the economics of abundance, as opposed to an affluent society organized on the basis of the economics of scarcity” (128). And this economics of abundance is in his opinion characterized by “abundant food, abundant shelter, abundant clothing, abundant necessities of life and abundant amenities, within reasonable cost and within the reach of many” (124).

As an economic ideology, Neo-welfarism will have the ingredients of capitalism, socialism and welfarism; but it will be capitalist, it will not be socialist, and it will not be welfarist per se. rather, it will be a harmony of opposites, a top of our extended family system to further the frontiers of state responsibility for all its citizens [7]. He further argues that “Neo-welfarism embraces belief in private enterprise, reinforced by state participation in the private sector and state collaboration in management technology for competently and efficiently administering, on the profitable basis, statutory corporations and parastatals, commercial enterprises, including government-owned, government-controlled and government-sponsored companies”.

As a political ideology, he argued that the objective of neo-welfarism in Nigeria is to restore democracy by building a new political leviathan where there will be political freedom, economic security, and social inequality. Deducible from the above discourse on Azikiwe’s philosophy of neo-welfarism is the fact that he was dissatisfied with capitalism, socialism and welfarism in themselves. This necessitated the imperativeness of his use of the eclectic pragmatic method in the harmonization and the sifting of the good aspects of the ideologies so mentioned above into a single system that he named neo-welfarism. This harmonization is both complementary and portends a better system that does not refute completely as it were, the tenets of the other ideologies that were operational in parts of the world at the time of his philosophizing [8].

Criticism of Azikiwe’s Neo-Welfarism

A critical evaluation of Azikiwe’s Neo-welfarism reveals that it has within itself, some drawbacks. These have been highlighted in the next subsections.

Illogicality

Joseph Omoregbe and Ezekiel Kolawole Ogundowole have advanced criticisms against Azikiwe’s Neo-Welfarism. On his part, Omoregbe argued that there is via media between capitalism and socialism any more than there is a via media between injustice and justice or between vices and virtue [9]. He avers further that Neo-Welfarism contradicts the laws of thought especially, the law of excluded middle, which states that anything is either A or not A, that is, a thing is either A or B and cannot be both at the same time. It is either Capitalism or Socialism. For there can never be Capitalism during Socialism in the true or logical sense of nomenclature because both are ideologically divided. Hence, Zik’s eclecticism or via media violates the law of excluded middle, and as such, it has the philosophical implication of illogicality.

On his part, Ogundowole has challenged Azikiwe’s eclectic methodology as applied in the case of Neo-welfarism. To him, “it is just like the case when a glass of milk is mixed with another glass of lime juice. The result is obvious – incompatibility. Mixed social-economic systems will invariably advance to a stage where the whole system becomes frustrated and eventually collapsed and destroyed” [10].

He further argued that:

Mixed systems based on an eclectic methodological approach can never lead to the attainment of self-realisation because, like the mixture of water with oil, both the good from capitalism and the good from socialism will never get blend [sic]. They, obeying simple Aristotelian logic, will always co-exist sided by side together with all the problems that logically follow therefrom.

Again, Azikiwe fails to show with exactitude, which elements of Capitalism, Socialism and Welfarism he considers as good and intends to forge a harmonization. This omission makes the ideology to lack the weight it ought to have. In his contribution to the critique of Neo-welfarism, Agbafor argued that the ideology did not as much as explain how individual and collective interests can be balanced and synchronized. It also fails to show how the publicly owned economic resources can be efficiently and profitably run for the people’s overall wellbeing (364).

Ambiguity

Yet, another drawback of Azikiwe’s ideology is that the theory is ambiguous. Azikiwe failed to explain the difference between ‘Neo-welfarism’ and the ‘mixed economic system’ (367). In this regard, Okaneme has observed that: If Neo-welfarism is to be adopted as the political and economic

ideal in the Nigerian democratic principle, it must be clearly defined and understood so that its meaning is not lost in ambiguity. The welfare programs which Neo-welfarism sets out to achieve must remain enshrined in the nation's constitution and its implementation must be sacrosanct (132).

Thus, Neo-welfarism appears to lack the exactitude from which to draw actionable principles.

Impracticability

Another contemporary challenge to this theory is the question of its practicability. It is hard to practice Azikiwe's via media principle in the 21st century where Capitalism has been accepted and spread all over the world. As Okaneme argues, "it seems Neo-welfarism does not have the adequate ingredients to withstand and replace Socialism and Capitalism or even Welfarism as the best alternative, even as each of them harbours some dangerous defects" (134).

A Response to the Criticism against Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism

This section seeks to undertake a rethink of the criticisms against Zik's ideology of Neo-welfarism. Okaneme holds the view that a critical examination of the criticism against Neo-welfarism is necessary (132).

On the Issue of Ambiguity

Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism appears to favour a mixed economic system. This is why many believe that Azikiwe should have drawn a boundary line between his ideology and mixed economy for clarity's sake. This is necessary since "private and public ownership of the means of production and exchange encouraged by mixed economic system is what Azikiwe claims would obtain in the Neo-welfarist economy" [5].

For this reason, many will naturally be disposed to see Neo-welfarism as a "mixed economy" which Azikiwe defined as an economic system in which some factors in the means of production, distribution and exchange are privately or publicly owned; an economic system which allows individuals, statutory bodies or parastatal organisations to own, sponsor, control or manage any aspect of the economy as a giving or profitable concern (4).

Although, it can be argued that both Neo-welfarism and mixed economy share certain things in common, they are not the same. In any case, Azikiwe's presentation of Neo-welfarism makes it easy to dismiss it "as a mere neologism for mixed economy" [5]. However, Agbafor argues that there is a difference between the two systems; especially when we

recall that there is no specific demand on the state operating the mixed economic system to be welfarist, and that it is mandatory for the Neo-welfarist state to ensure the welfare of all citizens through appropriate legislations and practices. Then the difference between them is made clearer (252).

Thus, Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism is not too defected to be adopted as the political and economic ideal in the Nigerian democratic space. All that needs to be done is to clearly define its welfare programmes and enshrine them in the nation's constitution, so that its implementation will become sacrosanct [4].

On Impossibility of Synthesizing Capitalism and Socialism

Another major fault in Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism was his attempt to reconcile two opposing and contradictory ideologies. He says that "ideology does not modify but blend opposite views" (Azikiwe 111). Omoregbe criticized Azikiwe on the basis of founding "a via media or an eclectic harmony between Capitalism and Socialism. He maintained that seeking a via media between Capitalism and Socialism was like proposing a via media between injustice and justice, egoism and altruism or vice and virtue" [11].

Contrary to what Azikiwe thought, Omoregbe argued that Welfarism was not a political system different from Capitalism and Socialism but rather "an adulterated Socialism characterized by Capitalist egoism" (120). In the same manner, Agbafor argued that Zik did not explain the difference between "Neo-welfarism and the mixed economic system" (251).

However, even though, the so-called harmony of ideologies by Nnamdi Azikiwe may not be a practically realizable project, it is worthy of note that Nigeria's democracy can still imbibe certain good elements in Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism (Okaneme 133). Even in the so-called Capitalist countries of the world (like the Western world) there are elements of welfarism and socialism which influence the way they treat the state interacts with the citizenry in terms of provision of welfare and guarantee of human rights. This can be done in Nigeria as well, not just because it is a good thing to do, but because it coheres with the communalist nature of the traditional African setting; which dictates that one must cater for ones 'brother'.

On Non-Specification of Good Elements that should be Harmonized

Another major objection that ultimately challenges the reliability of the theory of Neo-welfarism is its inherent failure to stipulate the particular or specific elements in

each of Capitalism, Socialism and Welfarism that should be pragmatically harmonized with the indigenous African economic system. It is obvious that Azikiwe adduced arguments against each of the economic system but he failed to assert which one he rejected or accepted, neither in part nor in whole. Agbafor argues that this failure makes Azikiwe's ideology fluid and vacuous. It makes Neo-welfarism an amorphous ideology which has a name without a precise content [12].

Furthermore, Agbafor notes that even though Azikiwe's Neo-welfarist state allows private and public ownership of the means of production, it fails to state the extent to which the individuals and the public would go in acquiring productive means. This implies a contradiction, the profit motive and individual initiative would be encouraged, but at the same time the state would not condone the expropriation of man [4].

The above flaws notwithstanding, the relevance of Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism will be better understood if we take cognisance of the time it was propounded. It was a time when there was a search for an ideology of emancipation from the shackles of colonialism. At the time it was both timely and laudable; even as it is today.

More so, Azikiwe's major concern was the formulation of an effective ideology for the decolonization of Africa. It is a post-colonial ideology that sought to harmonise the valuable elements of the major existing ideologies (through the eclectic method) for man's common good in post-colonial Africa. Thus, Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism constitutes an alternative to the two most antagonistic economic doctrines in the modern world: Capitalism and Socialism [4]. By the way, none of the other ideologies is perfect, if the founders of Capitalism and Socialism had insisted on theoretical perfection rather than practical applicability, then there would have remained on the shelves of academic libraries and the world would not have heard anything about them. In the same way if we insist on theoretical perfection, we shall miss the applicability of Azikiwe's Neo-welfarism forever. Neo-welfarism "suggests a viable path to present and future economic development and political integration" [5]. Therefore, the way forward is to take steps towards its application.

The Tenability of Azikiwe's Neo-Welfarism Today

Granted, there are inherent and perceived loopholes in Azikiwe's ideology, Neo-welfarism remains a worthy venture and should not be thrown into the trash can just like that. However, the question that arises naturally; 'how exactly can we apply Neo-welfarism?'

Azikiwe himself answers this question:

It is not syncretic because it does not attempt to reconcile or combine irreconcilables. Rather, it leaves the contradictions [un]resolved but blends [the] incompatibles to make them practicable for utilitarian purposes. Its merit lies in the fact that by applying this method, any persons or group of persons can add, subtract, multiply or divide any idea and adapt it to their situation or historical circumstance (111).

Thus, Agbafor argues that the harmonization of opposing ideologies through eclectic pragmatism would save energy and time formerly wasted on quarrelling over points of difference. Such energy and time would then be expended towards the provision of goods and services for the benefit of all (296). We need not to resolve our contradictions, but "to blend our incompatibilities" in order to achieve desired goals. This implies that we can begin to accommodate our good ideas and harmonize them to build a stronger nation and lasting democracy. Hence, tribalism, extremism, hatreds, parochialism and other social vices would be things of the past.

Agbafor succinctly captures this in this way: Political rapport and possible integration which would follow from the eclectic harmonization of ideologies would discourage the kind of extremism and dogmatism which vitiate the modern world The eclectic pragmatic method is a useful and dynamic method of understanding reality in general and socio-political reality in particular (219).

Neo-welfarism teaches humaneness. This principle is not contrary to any Nigerian values. Azikiwe argues that "neo-welfarism will allow private ownership of property and private motive is an individual initiative" [3]. There is not indigenous Nigerian value that is opposed to this ideal either. Thus, implementing this ideal by including it in our Constitution will not be a problem.

Moreso, Azikiwe argues for the "restoration and re-enforcement of the fundamental rights of the Nigerian citizens as entrenched and guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution without temporization or equivocation or derogation. According to Omoregbe, "In the neo-welfarist state, the government shall not be above the law. The fundamental human rights shall be guaranteed" (167). How exactly is that going to happen?

sums up the political and economic objectives of neo-welfarism in these words: The neo-welfarist state will assume the responsibility of freeing the citizens from hunger, diseases, ignorance and fear. Its aim will be to have abundance of goods. The state will participate in the private sector enterprise by sponsoring companies. It will adopt the

policy of free enterprise and regulated competition. It will be a democratic state with individual liberty and equality before the law. There shall be checks and balances in the state in order to ensure stability” [3].

Therefore, Neo-welfarism remains a great and useful ideology which can form a solid foundation for social, political and economic development of Nigeria. Its eclectic pragmatic method remains a model for unity and survival of the Nigerian state whose future and survival has been threatened every now and then by poor governance. Neo-welfarism presents Nigeria with a critical window of opportunity for the sustenance of her nascent democracy. Neo-welfarism possesses the potential to create a viable path to present and future economic development as well as political and social integration of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The above discussing has been centred on revisiting the criticisms against Azikiwe’s Neo-welfarism to see it has any potential for a practical application. The paper has identified certain factors that led to Azikiwe’s proposal of this ideology. These include recurring military coups, the attendant bad governance in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, and the Cold War. Also, it has been made clear that Neo-welfarism is an attempt to harmonize capitalism, socialism, and of the two systems and termed it “neo-welfarism”. Also, the criticism against Neo-welfarism was re-examined in the course of charting a path for its everyday application. Finally, a proposal on how the ideology can be practiced successfully was presented. We therefore conclude that Nigeria is not groping in the dark due to want of an ideology. Rather, it is due to a lack of the political will to implement a viable ideology. Hence, we recommend Neo-welfarism, not because it is perfect, but because it possesses the potential to propel the country out of the current ideological darkness, and place it on the path of meaningful development; the kind of development that will better the lot of the common man.

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