

HE can babysit: but can he act tough?

Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah Esq.
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Last weekend, the President and his cabinet converged yet again for the third cabinet retreat. Several media outlets report that the President without mincing words, berated the general shortage of satisfactory performance by cabinet members since he assumed the reins of government. In his own very words, he says that he has been *babysitting them for so long and that 2020 is a year of action!*

Now, this really got me pensive. 2018 was when I first made the decision to vote in Sierra Leone despite being born and having lived all my life in Sierra Leone save for a year-long study hiatus. By the twilight of their second term in office, APC had outdone themselves on every political mischief or shenanigans and so the sweet-sounding promises of the New Direction manifesto entranced the people of Sierra Leone. The 2018 run-off was the very first time to cast a vote in my life and I was already over 30 by then. I was swayed by the tale of bravery of a twenty-something year who was at the frontlines of the civil war defending our nation against internal strife. Charmed by that military bravado, I envisioned a leadership with the audacity to enforce the laws even against his own. I was convinced beyond doubt that a man who pulled the trigger in his 20's would certainly be aggressively bold to trigger laws to curb corruption, policies to stimulate economic growth and fiery action against lawlessness in Sierra Leone once and for all. I was convinced that he was the man of the moment so were the over-a-million Sierra Leoneans who voted for him on the basis of his manifesto.

So livid I was when I listened to sound bite of the President confessing that he had been babysitting the ministers. I felt disappointed for three reasons.

To start with, there is nowhere in the New Direction manifesto that the President would babysit for the first two years in office. Our nation has been left behind on almost everything in life except the fact of our existence. We are in need of almost everything but certainly babysitting ministers is not one of them.

Secondly, the admission by the President is telling about the competence of his team. Babies don't run a nation; technocrats do. You see when you ignore technocrats and appoint lackeys (yes-men) you sure have a lot of tending to do to with the latter.

Lastly, the President's babysitting duty has just added to his huge responsibilities to lead and govern. This certainly is distracting and saps him of the energy required to focus on the tasks which he was voted to discharge.

Now my point is that Sierra Leoneans did not vote for the President to breastfeed and babysit. He was voted to lead...to hire the right hands, minds and skills....and to fire them but not to babysit them. To babysit ministers and heads of statutory entities is nurturing incompetence and mediocrity. Governance is not about babysitting; it is for people who have shown expertise and character in their career or work and are fully ready for the vagaries of leadership. Appointing a baby at the ministry of lands would mean that there would just be more land disputes, abuse and misuse of office but no policies to address perennial land problems. Giving the energy sector to an inexperienced partisan would only graduate blackout to another level. Entrusting the health sector into the wrong hands would fester our health crisis. The worse is committing the economy of the nation to folks who are only au fait with textbook solutions.

Now more than ever before we seek for that man who held a rifle in defence of our nation in his youth and assumed power at 29. The man who rose to the rank of Brigadier not for babysitting but for his bravery of heart and steel will to take action. That is the man who was voted in office and not a babysitter. We hope the promises would re-echo and the gallantry of the President would arise from slumber. Give us what you promised us: a new direction in governance; a new direction in land and country planning; a new direction in electricity and water supply; a new direction in the economy; a new direction in the distribution of wealth—just like you are doing in corruption and education.