

NIGERIA

AFTER THE ELECTIONS

A Special Correspondent

NIGERIA is passing through very difficult times—times which, as President Azikiwe has said, ‘try men’s souls’. The first-ever general elections to be held in the Republic since Nigeria wrenched herself free from British colonial tutelage on October 1, 1960, ended in a fiasco. Leading Nigerian politicians, amongst whom was the Premier of Eastern Nigeria and leader of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.), Dr. Michael Okpara, said the December 30th elections were a huge farce. Others were of the opinion that the general conduct of the elections was a gigantic fraud. Dr. Tunji Otegbeye, Secretary-General of the left-wing Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (S.W.A.F.P.), described the polls as a muddle. Prime Minister Alhaji Abubaka Tafawa Balewa, deputy leader of the Northern People’s Congress (N.P.C.), while not denying that irregularities existed in the manner of the December polls advised that complaints should be directed to the law courts for redress.

The majority of Nigeria’s politicians and statesmen are afraid to admit that the present impasse in which Nigeria is enthralled is not just a political crisis over the health of the last elections. The simple truth is that Nigeria is drifting towards revolution. Though the fires of political agitation which marked the election may have diminished it is far from true that the crisis is over, nor has the swearing in of Alhaji Abubaka’s ‘broadly based national government’ really resolved the crisis.

The evasiveness with which the Southern Nigeria-based Progressive Grand Alliance tolerated the six-point Azikiwe-Balewa compromise pact ‘ending the crisis’ is indicative of deep uneasiness. The alliance while doubting the constitutional legality of Alhaji Abubaka government, would give it ‘a fair trial’. One wonders how practicable that is.

What one sees in the present apparent calm is a lull between storms. The first storms wrecked the elections. They created an atmosphere of political intolerance and acrimony. How did it all begin?

Fleeing British colonialists bequeathed to Nigeria a capitalist economy tailored to the interest of foreign businessmen and their local agents. A feudal economic administration was imposed on the capitalist foundation. During four years of Nigeria's independence this control constricted the national economy. The structure which lacked purpose and firm direction, led to serious contradictions of a socio-economic nature and resulted in stagnation. By December 8th, 1964, when President Azikiwe dissolved the 312-member House of Representatives for fresh elections, a correlation of political forces had taken place out of which emerged two broad fronts. Each presented a programme on how best to arrest further deterioration in the national economy.

A rightist trend of feudal conservatism was represented by the Northern People's Congress, a party of feudal aristocrats of Northern Nigeria. The N.P.C. together with the comprador bourgeois party of Western Nigeria (Nigerian National Democratic Party) teamed up in the inappropriately named Nigerian National Alliance.

Opposed in theory, if not in practice, to this right-wing reaction, were the national bourgeois parties—the N.C.N.C. and the Action Group. Though dreading a genuine left movement, they advanced certain socialist slogans and united their forces. Their unity gave birth to the Progressive Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A.). The progressive character of the U.P.G.A. was illustrated by the inclusion within it of the anti-feudal forces of Northern Nigeria—the Northern Progressive Front.

A third line of action was represented by the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (a Marxist-Leninist Party) supported by the progressive trade unions. The S.W.A.F.P. advocated a unity of all progressive parties as a sure step forward in the march against feudalism—feudalism which had proved the greatest obstacle to any progress in Nigeria. Drawing lessons from its analysis of the nature of Nigerian feudalism and class struggle, the S.W.A.F.P. contended that so long as the feudalists controlled the Federal Government, Nigeria's independence will be more fictional than real. It called for a united democratic front. In the absence of such a front, the party pledged to co-operate with the U.P.G.A. to make it impossible for the feudalists to retain power by constitutional methods, by fair and free elections.

ANTI-FEUDAL UPSURGE

But in a Nigeria where the feudalists have in actual practice succeeded in placing themselves in positions where at their capricious pleasure

they have bent the will of the nation to their own, it was illusory to expect fair and free elections. The abnormal structure of the Nigerian federation left about two-thirds of the entire area in the feudal stronghold of the north, where over 50 per cent of all parliamentary seats are located (167 out of 312) and loads the electoral system in favour of the feudalists. But even so, events in the last days of Parliament had shaken the faith of the Northern rulers that they could jockey themselves back to power through free elections.

Strategists of the N.P.C. had counted for victory on the inability of the progressive forces to present a united front at the polls. In this they were frustrated by the formation of the U.P.G.A. and the sincere pledge of the S.W.A.F.P. to work in amity with the alliance based on principles and substance. Things were really moving badly for the turbaned horsemen of the north. The repression of the Tivs (a minority Christian community of 1.5 million) by the Northern Nigeria Government a few weeks before the election drove a wedge between the feudalists and a significant sector of the electorate. Never before in Nigeria's political history had the feudalists been so unpopular with the masses as during the election period last year. And never before had the anti-feudal forces exhibited such mature understanding and a determined willingness to co-operate. The banishment of the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Sanusi, one of the most influential rulers in the Moslem North, by the Northern Nigeria Government boomeranged against the feudalists. The passage of a law by that Regional Government which empowers it to banish or exile emirs without giving reason, further discredited the feudalists.

The history of the N.P.C. and its election victories is the history of the moral and practical support of the emirs to that party. In the December 1959 general elections the powers of the emirs were at their zenith. The politically unconscious masses of the North adored the emirs and the progressive parties were divided and antagonistic to one another. Even then the N.P.C. failed to secure a majority. Though the party won 134 of the 167 seats in the North, the state of the parties in Parliament was N.P.C. 134; N.C.N.C. and allies 89; Action Group and allies 75. From the figures it is evident that without the support given by the then Azikiwe-led N.C.N.C. (now in the U.P.G.A.) to the feudalists in forming the Federal Coalition Government, the position of the feudalists in Nigeria today would have been different. Nigerians would have been better off, and imperialism and neo-colonialism would have been worse off.

FEUDAL TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED GANGSTERISM

The feudalists, desperate at having lost their ally (N.C.N.C.) to the

progressives, took to violence as the last chance. The actions of the N.P.C.-led Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A.) betrayed its leadership's loss of faith in democratic elections. That party organized terrorists who murdered candidates of the progressive parties in cold blood. In Sokoto Province (nerve-centre of N.P.C. influence), four candidates of the grand alliance were killed. Armed gangs on the pay sheet of the N.N.A. kidnapped candidates of the progressive parties. These and other criminal methods of intimidation forced some candidates of the progressive parties to flee to safety. Under these tragic circumstances, seventy candidates of the Northern People's Congress were returned 'unopposed' in the Northern Region at the close of nominations on December 19th. Prime Minister Alhaji Abubaka was returned 'unopposed' in his Bauchi constituency. The law enforcement sector of the Northern Nigeria Government actively connived in the crimes as shown by sworn affidavits. 'Native Authority' policemen arbitrarily arrested thousands of supporters of the progressive parties. The 'Native Court' judges (alkalis) sentenced the accused to heavy terms of imprisonment in the fashion of the inquisition. Charges ranged from 'taking part in unlawful assemblies'—political party rallies—to using 'insulting language' against feudal aristocrats. Alli Abdali, U.P.G.A. candidate in Kano Province, was jailed for twelve months on a charge that he insulted the leader of the N.P.C. and Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. The Federal Nigerian police were passive in the face of such atrocities.

Reflecting on the situation in Northern Nigeria, President Azikiwe wrote in a planned broadcast to the nation on January 1st. 'The evidence before me shows that there were refusals of permit for peaceful assembly in a supposedly free and fair election; road blocks were mounted and trenches dug to prevent entry of political opponents into towns.

'There were mass arrests of political opponents; many political opponents have been imprisoned and several others killed; political opponents have been prevented from filling nomination papers.'

THE BOYCOTT—A FAR-SIGHTED DECISION

Under the circumstances, only one peaceful course of action was open to the progressive parties—a total boycott of the polls. This the U.P.G.A. and the S.W.A.F.P. did and resolved not to recognize any government sworn in on the basis of the rigged elections. In the face of the effective boycott the feudalism-led N.N.A. announced that it had won a land-slide victory. Figures later revealed that some of the 'victorious' candidates polled not more than 600 votes in constituencies

where there were over 70,000 registered voters. The majority of voters stayed away from the polls in obedience to the boycott call.

The boycott has been criticized in certain political quarters as being a mistake. Far from being an error of judgment, it was a far-sighted decision. Two courses of action were open to the progressive parties in the situation of criminal terrorism. One was to answer violence with violence. Millions would have been drowned in blood and the stability of the Federation would have been dangerously upset. The feudalists had looked forward to a situation of violence in which they would have felt justified in calling for the aid of British troops. The support given by the out-going Nigerian Government to U.S.-Belgian aggression in the Congo in November last year, is a pointer to what that Government can do in a condition of sporadic and ill-organized anti-feudal uprisings and general unrest in the Republic. The feudalists had also seen in any ensuing chaos a rare opportunity for them to liquidate the progressives in the country by abuse of the State apparatus. The Cabinet Ministers in charge of the armed forces and security organs, including the Prime Minister, were all members of the Northern People's Congress. By the election boycott the treacherous plans of the feudalists were exposed and wrecked without a shot being fired.

The boycott was a defeat for British imperialism and its local agents, at a time when the progressive front has not prepared the necessary groundwork to fight back against the foreign-backed feudalists by confronting violence with violence. A line of action based on violence is out of the question at the present stage unless the masses become class conscious and organized, become trained and educated in class struggle against, for the present, the entire Nigerian feudal régime of the putrid autocracy. Even the present leadership (with some exceptions), has yet much to learn in the art, tactics and methods of combat against Nigeria's bastard feudal system. Hence the necessity for a united democratic anti-feudal front. The realization of this bitter fact in no small measure determined the attitude of the progressive parties to the savage assaults against them by vandals of the N.N.A. The mature judgment of the U.P.G.A. and S.W.A.F.P. prevented a 'Katanga' in Nigeria. British imperialism has really lost.

Boycott of the elections was a peaceful assault which made nonsense of the polls in fact if not in law. It created serious doubts in political quarters in and outside Nigeria as to the moral standards and political integrity of those Nigerians who will assume office on the basis of these elections. In this also the progressives won. The moral impact created by the boycott was stated by President Azikiwe, 'The issues involved in this crisis,' he said, 'are essentially moral. If those who won the federal elections under the tragic circumstances we have recently

experienced insisted on applying the letter of the law, then in my humble opinion [in the opinion I would add, of the great majority of Nigerians and mankind in general] it would be a Pyrrhic victory.'

The boycott has thus laid the foundation for successful resistance against the feudalists. President Azikiwe, reflecting on what may lie ahead if a government took office under those circumstances recalled the words and thoughts of late U.S. President Woodrow Wilson:

'We should then realize that victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently but as upon quicksand.'

Having won the moral contest, the progressives have moved into the legal battle.

'NATIONAL' GOVERNMENT

On January 4th, President Azikiwe called on Alhaji Abubaka to form a Government not many hours after he (President Azikiwe) had stated he would rather resign than swear in a Government on the results of the December 30th elections.

'I find it extremely awkward to exercise the power to call upon any person to form a government. True the constitution is clear on this issue but my decision is that I will not exercise such a power and I would rather resign. This should release my conscience from the chains of power politics.'

It is not yet clear whether President Azikiwe swore in the Balewa Government only on the basis of the election results or on a vague mutual undertaking by Alhaji Abubaka that he would form a 'broadly based national government'. No matter on what terms the Government took office, one thing is certain—the feudalists are back again in the saddle. And with it a stepping up of the anti-feudal campaign in new dimensions and in different forms.

The progressives are faced with a decision whether or not to participate in the new Government. Much will depend on what Prime Minister Alhaji Abubaka would regard as a 'broadly based national government'. Already, he has put out the wrong foot first. He has appointed three new ministers from his party, thereby giving the Cabinet a 'one-party' appearance.

At this stage it must be observed that all is not well within the U.P.G.A. A war of nerves is raging between the middle class and upper strata bourgeoisie. While the progressive intellectuals backed by the youth, the students, the rank and file, advocate that participation should be guided by 'no sacrifice of principles', the upper segments crave for government office on any terms, including capitulation to the feudalists. They strive to create situations which will enable them

to strike a huckster's bargain with the feudalists. This bourgeoisie, owing to their class position are incapable of waging a decisive struggle against feudalism. They are too heavily fettered by private property, capital and land to enter into any decisive struggle. They strive to come to terms with feudal autocracy rather than crush it. They are too much in need of feudalism with its medieval 'native' administration, police and thugs for use ultimately against the workers and peasants, to be able to strive for its destruction. But the progressives are not deceived. They entertain no illusions on this score. They know the treacherous nature of the bourgeoisie.

Every action and statement from the leadership of the Northern People's Congress before and after the December polls indicates that the feudalists are hardly interested in a national government in which the progressives will play any part of importance. Their seeming preparedness to have a 'national government' is a ruse calculated to give the new Government an appearance of legality and a sense of moral security. They plan to include some anti-feudal ministers just to place the Government on a firmer footing, reduce the mounting opposition from the progressive masses and then turn around when firmly established to give the progressives the boot. Whatever is done by the progressive forces should be looked upon as a stage in the continuation of the anti-feudal struggle. Parliament should be utilized to sharpen class contradictions, expose feudal reaction and arouse the public against neo-colonialists, in order to prepare the masses for the inevitable all-out anti-feudal campaign. If it does not contribute to this aim, any decision to join hands with the feudalists in the Balewa Cabinet would prove a tragic error. This is a more likely outcome. And reasons are not difficult to find.

With the feudalists in power, and with a Parliament in which they would readily secure a two-thirds majority, experience points to what will top the priority list of legislation. (a) Further curtailment of individual liberty and freedom, and (b) Further inroads into the independence of the judiciary, reducing it to a pawn of reactionary politicians. At present appointment to the bench is on the recommendation of political executives. Even the office of Solicitor-General has been brought under the whims and caprices of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney-General, who is a politician. All these proposals are aimed at suppressing the progressive elements and stemming the anti-feudal tide. How far Nigeria is from being a dictatorship is anybody's guess, but it is a dictatorship that is digging its own grave.

What Nigeria needs at this stage is a provisional government in which a broad sector of the political and social life of the nation will

be democratically represented. The main task of the provisional government will be to take measures to lessen the present political tension, keep the State machinery working and prepare the nation for free and fair elections. Such a government will be purely transitional and will have a normal life span of six months.

The terms of the Azikiwe-Balewa pact may lure the grand alliance to a surrender of the well-begun campaign against feudalism, and come to terms with the feudalists. The terms of the agreement include a reaffirmation of belief in the unity of the Federation 'in which every citizen shall have equal opportunity and no one shall be oppressed; a strict observance of the constitution until it is amended according to law and wish of the people; and a review of the Nigerian Constitution and dissolution of the Western House of Assembly to enable the people to express their will as to who should govern them.

It is sheer fantasy for any sincere Nigerian citizen to think that 'equal opportunity for all' could exist under the present régime. It is impossible. The feudalists are bent on protecting their class interest as opposed to the interest of the common people whose class is historically antagonistic to theirs. Every action of the Government, the State apparatus, is directed towards class oppression. How can equal opportunity exist for all in a society where abject poverty for the masses is the rule rather than the exception; where a bunch of cut-throats have climbed on the bones of the masses to heights of mammon wealth; where the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' yawns wider each second of the day; where imperialism and neo-colonialism have found reliable allies in the feudal rulers. This is the root cause of all Nigerian ailments. The poverty-drenched masses cannot peacefully coexist with feudalism, they cannot compromise with the enemies of liberty and independence. The masses are pitching battle against the accursed heritage of serfdom and human degradation.

SECESSION IS NO ANSWER

Some are seeking a solution in breaking up the Nigerian Federation by some areas seceding. This is hardly an answer.

No one region of Nigeria could hope to benefit immediately after a secession, no matter how peacefully the sharing was conducted. The regions have for decades been interdependent, revolving on a federal axis. Secession will steer the regions on a collision course. Secession will bring about economic problems for each region which if not retarding the development of that part will surely halt its progress for a long time to come. Hitherto neglected problems will assume colossal proportions. Yet unknown ones will arise. These are many and diverse. They demand various, not-easy-to-find prescriptions and cures. The

broad masses, the generality, unprivileged and under-privileged Nigerians, tens of millions of them, will be worse off. Only a few politicians stand to gain. Their selfishly motivated actions will ignite inflammable situations, the tragedy of which they would hardly escape.

Secession would mean an abandonment of progressive elements in the north. The revolutionary Tivs would be the first victims. They have continued to exist and to have warded off encroachment on their liberty only because of the surveillance of the Federal Coalition Government. The Tivs have consistently identified themselves with progressive anti-feudal fronts. If the north or any part of the south secedes, then the fate of the minority Tivs would be sealed. A seceded Northern Nigeria could maintain stability only by ruthless crushing of the opposition. The ruling Northern People's Congress likens in thought and in deed parliamentary opposition to an unwanted luxury—a luxury which they say is alien and contrary to the tenets of Islam and the Fulani mode of administration. Every measure of that Government is aimed at removing the last vestiges of opposition. That party and the Government it runs move steadily towards a despotism. It would be a betrayal if the teeming millions of Northern Nigeria peasantry swamped in illiteracy and enslaved by a medieval feudal system, the peasantry which continually looks southwards for salvation, should be left all alone at the mercy of their slave masters. It would be unpardonable for the southern politicians if they should retire to the south leaving the fate of the opposition parties in the north to the jackals of the north, in a fragmented Nigeria. This situation can be brought about by the secession of any part of the country, more especially the south. Let us examine the various regions.

Eastern Nigeria is the most politically stable region in the Federation, though dissatisfaction with the state of affairs is increasing. Eastern Nigeria has a strident minority problem. The confidence of the minority groups in the Government of that region has continually been bolstered and nurtured by the protection which the Federal Nigeria Government promises and offers them. Secede Eastern Nigeria from the Federation, then the minority people will seek other measures of protection. The situation might get explosive and proportionately dangerous. These minority groups have made no secret of their determination to have a separate State of their own—free from the intrusions of Ibo domination real or imaginary. (The Ibos are the majority tribe in the east.)

The political situation in *Western Nigeria* at present is chaotic enough; secession would increase the chaos. For three years the Western Region and her 10 million people have experienced a chain of political crises which are far from over, and which have caused economic setbacks. The present Government can claim popular

support only with very serious reservations. Not until after fresh fair and free elections have been held to the Western Nigeria Legislature can any government there establish an order which will be constitutionally backed, legally upheld and morally supported; the present Government came into being after a putsch early in 1964. Western Nigeria has since the emergency of 1962 relied on the Federal Coalition Government for financial aid. One cannot overlook the danger that a seceded Western Nigeria might seek aid elsewhere and, hard pressed, auction her independence to a willing bidder. Such a situation would endanger the security of the neighbouring Regions or States.

Mid-Western Nigeria, where an oil boom had raised the hopes of politicians, is politically inexperienced. This is the youngest Region of the Federation, and depends on Federal Government aid in no small measure. With a population of 2 million inhabitants the region has the greatest number of clan-conscious groups with strong tribal loyalties. The unifying force has been the Federal Nigeria Constitution. If the Mid-West Region secedes, she could find herself torn apart by warring clan factions.

In a dismembered Nigeria the future of the federal capital, Lagos, would be in dispute. Western Nigeria may revive her claim over Lagos, for access to Lagos from most parts of the Federation is through Western Nigeria territory or air space. From the east, Lagos is accessible via the Atlantic Ocean, by-passing Western Nigeria territory, but Eastern Nigerians are far from being sea-farers.

All in all, it is evident that a quest for secession of any part of the Federation is mad adventurism. The proposal for secession marks the utter hopelessness and despair of the southern bourgeois politicians who, having lost hope for the overthrow of the feudal régime in the north, have become terrified of a predicted feudal take-over of what is still left them in the south. These southern politicians who exhibit such glaring cowardice have completely severed ties with historical reality and the immutable laws governing the development of society.

Nigeria shall stride along bravely. Her millions of workers and peasants shall march in unity to the eternal goal—socialism. Feudalism shall be trampled underfoot. Imperialism shall succumb before the assault of the awakening revolutionaries. Led by the party of the proletariat (Socialist Workers and Farmers Party), in unison with the progressive trade unions, backed by the progressive intellectuals in a united national democratic front, the Nigerian people shall win their revolution—a vital revolution sweeping our giant continent—Africa!