

NIGERIA'S ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

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NIGERIA is the largest and most populous single colonial territory remaining in the British Empire. Situated on the west coast of Africa, on the shores of the Gulf of Guinea, it lies entirely within the Tropics.

The total area of the territory (including the area of that part of the Cameroons, former colony of Imperial Germany, now under United Kingdom trusteeship) is 373,250 sq. miles. Nigeria, therefore, is about four times the area of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is larger than all Germany, France, Belgium and Holland together.

Yet many people awoke to the size and importance of Nigeria only as a result of press publicity in connection with the Royal visit early this year. Nigeria will figure prominently in the news again in September when the fact will dawn on many people that yet another colonial territory—an entirely African country—is about to cross the threshold into independence.

Nigeria's history as a British colonial possession has been a short but strangely chequered one. It has been described as an "arbitrary block of Africa". That is an apt description. For the territory was carved by British imperialism from the body of the African continent during the imperialist "scramble for Africa" which took place at the end of the last century. And this operation was carried out with scant regard for ethnographic or economic realities. There were so many eager rivals for the possession of Nigeria and of Africa that there could be no room for finesse in the process of dismemberment.

The first Europeans to arrive in this part of West Africa were the Portuguese in 1472. The English arrived more than eighty years later, in 1553. Then followed what even British official reports now record as "a chapter in the world's history on which England, in common with other nations, now looks back with distaste. . . ."

An ever-increasing demand for Negro slaves for the plantations of America and the West Indian colonies resulted in ruthless competition among the maritime nations in their lucrative but nefarious traffic in human beings. Whole areas were depopulated; ancient cultures vanished with their peoples.

When at last the slave trade came to an end the activities of the imperialists changed from raiding the West African coastlands for slaves to the acquisition of territories and "spheres of influence". Rivalries among the Powers in this connection led to the Conference of Berlin in 1885. There the British representatives were able to claim successfully that British interests were supreme on the lower reaches of the River Niger and that territory—albeit ill-defined—on either bank of the river fell within the British sphere of influence.

From their base on the island of Lagos, where Britain had earlier established a Crown Colony, the British empire-builders, on one pretext or another, carried out a succession of armed expeditions into the interior. As a result of these, increasing areas were brought under British "protection". The great expanse of Northern Nigeria, comprising the remnants of the once great Fulani empire, was the last to be subdued. It was declared a "Protectorate" in the early years of the present century.

On January 1, 1914, Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated and the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria inaugurated. For the next thirty years the system of *Indirect Rule* was successfully applied in Nigeria. This technique of governing African peoples through traditional chiefs and tribal institutions has been a distinctive feature of British Colonial Administration. It preserved tribalism long after it would otherwise have disappeared and ensured that the political, economic and social development of many African peoples, for a long time, did not go beyond the limits imposed by a tribal form of society.

However, even if slowly at first, people do eventually succeed in bursting asunder the bonds which hold back their advancement. And the Nigerian people are no exception.

Apart from the great size of its territory, Nigeria has a great diversity of peoples, languages, religions and customs. The North, with its main nationalities, Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and Tiv, is largely Moslem; while the South, with Yoruba, Edo and Urhobo (in the western part), and Ibo, Ibibio, and Anang (in the eastern) is mainly Christian and Animist.

It is hardly surprising that, in view of these diversities, national consciousness did not develop in Nigeria until a comparatively recent date. But the pace of development has been rapid and to-day the cry for self-government is being raised in one form or another throughout the country.

It was in 1938 that demands which envisaged Nigeria as a single

nation-state began to be raised. Mainly responsible for popularising these demands, through newspaper articles and speeches, was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, now Prime Minister of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. Anti-imperialist sentiments began to take deep root among the Nigerians—especially those of the South—and movements for national liberation began to embrace ever wider sections of the population. Their demands have enforced the adoption of four constitutions since 1938.

The first mention of self-government was made in the "Youth Charter", a document adopted by the Nigerian Youth Movement, of which Dr. Azikiwe was a leading figure, in 1938. Outlining a concrete programme of national reconstruction as a "pre-requisite to self-government", the Charter stressed the need "to unify the different tribes of Nigeria by adopting and encouraging means which would foster better understanding and co-operation between the tribes so that they may come to have a common ideal. . . ."

Young Nigerians rallied to the Youth Movement in their thousands and soon the older organisations, whose horizons rarely extended beyond municipal boundaries, began to fade away. It was the Youth Movement representatives who were now winning seats on the Municipal and even on the Legislative Councils.

A period of difficulties resulting largely from personal ambitions and feuds among some of the leaders brought about the formation of breakaway groups. One of these took later on the first steps leading to the formation in 1944 of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.).

Inspired by Clause Three of the Atlantic Charter, which affirms "the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live", Nnamdi Azikiwe prepared a memorandum entitled "The Atlantic Charter and British West Africa" in 1943. The memorandum requested the immediate abrogation of the Crown Colony system of government and the substitution of representative government in the British West African territories for a period of ten years. Upon the expiry of that period the introduction of responsible government was claimed for a further period of five years, at the termination of which it would be presumed that the ground would have been prepared for the promotion of the British West African territories to Dominion status.

The publication of this document and its demands relating in particular to reforms in education, health, social welfare, mining, agriculture, finance, trade, etc., were received with much enthusiasm, especially among the youth of the country. On the

initiative of the Nigerian Union of Students, a national convention was convened in Lagos on August 26, 1944. At this, the foundation meeting of the N.C.N.C., Dr. Azikiwe's memorandum was adopted as the basis of the party's programme.

From its inception the N.C.N.C. campaigned vigorously against Nigeria's colonial status. The party attacked the Richards Constitution, the constitution then in force, linking opposition to certain of its features with popular indignation at certain ordinances enacted at the instigation of the Governor, Sir Arthur Richards (now Lord Milverton). These laws related to government control of African lands and mineral resources, and also to the appointment and deposition of chiefs.

In 1945 the first general strike in Nigeria's history took place. The N.C.N.C. gave the striking workers full support and as a result, its prestige gained considerably while that of the older parties, which refused to support the strike, fell proportionately.

Not only was the strike successful, the N.C.N.C. political campaign had the effect of forcing the Colonial Office in London to agree to review the Richards Constitution in 1950, instead of 1955 as had originally been proposed by Governor Richards.

The N.C.N.C. began as a heterogeneous movement which brought under its wing various tribes, communities and groupings on the basis of an anti-imperialist programme. Within a year of its formation it had over 180 affiliated organisations. These included political, trade union, co-operative, peasant, tribal, cultural, sporting, women's and youth organisations. It was fairly obvious that such a movement was bound sooner or later to develop serious internal differences and difficulties. There were a number of minor eruptions before a major crisis supervened in 1948. A number of professional men of Yoruba origin who held important positions in the N.C.N.C. had been attacking it as an Ibo organisation and complaining that Dr. Azikiwe was favouring fellow Ibos with the most important posts in the party. The Yoruba leaders broke away from the N.C.N.C. to launch their own separatist organisation "to unite the various clans and tribes in Yorubaland, and generally create and actively foster the idea of a single nationalism throughout Yorubaland".

The inaugural conference of this All-Yoruba tribal organisation, officially called *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*,¹ took place on June 5, 1948,

¹ *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, means the society of the descendants of Oduduwa—the legendary ancestor of the Yoruba people.

at Ile Ife. The chairman was the late Sir Adeyemo Alakija, wealthy barrister and member of the Governor's Executive Council.

In contrast to the N.C.N.C., which even if it is inconsistent in its practice, nevertheless proclaims the paramountcy of the interests of the workers, peasants and other under-privileged sections of the population, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa recognises "the system of chieftains and other tribal rulers, acknowledges their privileged position and leadership". (*The Times*, May 21, 1948.)

The formation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa was by no means an unusual step. For the various tribes and nationalities such as the Ibos, Ibibios, Edos and Ijaws already had their social and cultural organisations. These organisations were in most cases rendering valuable service to their respective peoples and the Egbe Omo Oduduwa could do a similar job on behalf of the Yoruba people. However, it chose to enter politics, taking this course, moreover, under the reactionary banner of exclusivism and of championing the class interests of the Yoruba chieftains and wealthy landowners. In this way the Egbe Omo Oduduwa helped only those forces which stood in the way of the achievement of independent nationhood for Nigeria.

In the middle of 1951, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed a political party, the Action Group, to contest the first general election under the Macpherson Constitution which took place over the period August to December of that year. The party was intended to function only in the Western Region at first, but later on attempts were made to establish branches in the other Regions and to put up candidates there. This effort has shown poor results.

Nationalism in the North has taken a rather different course from that of the South. The North with its autocratic Emirs was the traditional stronghold of the system of "indirect rule". The Jami'ya (or Northern People's Congress), like the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in the Western Region, began as a social and cultural organisation. However, under the leadership of Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Saradauna of Sokoto, two of the North's most prominent politicians, the Northern People's Congress declared itself a political party almost on the eve of the 1951 elections. Its programme enjoyed the almost unqualified support of the Northern House of Chiefs. It included retention of the Emirate system coupled with regional autonomy, but called for reform of local government and advocated eventual self-government for Nigeria. These Northerners have always said that self-

government would come in its own good time and they have refused to be stampeded into making demands linked with dates by Southern "hotheads" who were setting too fast a pace.

The truth of the matter is that the N.P.C. leaders fear that the more literate and politically conscious Southerners would swamp the administration in a self-governing Nigeria and the North would, in effect, be ruled from the South. There is, however, one other explanation of this distrust of the South. It is that it would be difficult in a democratic system of government for the Emirs of the North to retain their ancient rights and privileges. Indeed, these rights and privileges have already been under attack for some time. The Northern Elements Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.), which advocates the substitution of democratic forms of government for the autocratic rule of the Emirs, was in the field as a political organisation before the N.P.C. entered the fray. The workers, peasants and small traders of the North are rallying in increasing numbers to the support of N.E.P.U. The party, under the energetic leadership of its president, Mallam Aminu Kano, has been waging a relentless battle for universal adult suffrage, the secret ballot and freedom of speech and assembly. It was due largely to the denial of these elementary civil and democratic rights in the North that the N.E.P.U. did not fare better in the last general election. Supported by the N.C.N.C. with which it has an alliance, the N.E.P.U. will put forward a strong case at the London conference for electoral reform in the North.

The present Federal Constitution was introduced on October 1, 1954. It provides for a unicameral legislature which is only partly elected. Commercial interests (mainly those of British monopolies) have six special European representatives in the Federal legislature. There is also an Executive consisting of the Governor-General with three official and ten non-official members.

The 1954 Constitution preserved the division of Nigeria into three Regions—Northern, Eastern and Western—and with that the fixation of party political life along tribal lines. In the North, the Northern People's Congress is a party of the Hausa and Fulani aristocracy; in the Eastern Region, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons is mainly an Ibo party; and in the Western Region, the Action Group is a creation of middle class Yoruba intellectuals. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons alone can claim to be nation-wide in character. For it was successful in the Western as well as the Eastern Region in the last Federal Election, while in the North it maintains a firm alliance with the

Region's main opposition party, the Northern Elements Progressive Union.

In the Western Region general election held in May, the N.C.N.C. raised its strength in the Regional House of Assembly from 13 to 28—only 16 fewer than the ruling Action Group membership of the House. The N.C.N.C. poll was only 40,000 short of that for the Action Group.

In view of the fact that in the Federal election the N.C.N.C. won in the Western Region, the result in the Regional election, although registering a marked advance on that previously recorded, was a set-back for the N.C.N.C. Many potential votes were lost, undoubtedly because the N.C.N.C. election programme contained the argument that allocation of revenue between the regions should be based on need rather than on origin of the funds. To many Yorubas this was tantamount to the Western Region being required to subsidize the Eastern.

During recent months the main Nigerian political parties have been preparing their case which will be presented at the London Constitutional Conference in September. The N.C.N.C. started off with a declaration by Dr. Azikiwe at the party's convention last December. The declaration outlined a programme—the "Twelve Canons of Freedom"—which stated, among other things, that the status of Nigeria should no longer be that of a colony, but that of a completely self-governing member of the British Commonwealth; and that the Federal Government should be treated so as to preserve the political unity of the country while at the same time respecting diversities of language and culture, and the right of all the peoples to equal opportunity to develop.

Undoubtedly, at the Conference, the first and foremost issue will be self-government. On this the main parties are divided. Dr. Azikiwe has declared the N.C.N.C.'s opposition to the idea of separate constitutions for different Regions. Azikiwe has never abandoned the hope of achieving a united, self-governing Nigeria and he and his party want self-government for the whole Federation this year. While the N.C.N.C. is not opposed to a certain measure of regional autonomy, it considers this to be of far less importance than the issue of Federal self-government.

The Action Group, on the other hand, places Regional self-government first and wants to achieve this status for the Western Region this year. The party has formulated its proposals in this regard in some detail.

The Northern People's Congress desires no change in the

Federal House of Representatives. This can only be interpreted to mean that it opposes self-government for Nigeria this year—and, perhaps, for some time to come. The N.P.C., however, wants regional self-government for the North in 1959.

Another issue will be that affecting the vesting of "residual powers". The N.C.N.C., with the support of its opposition in the Eastern Region and N.E.P.U. in the North, wants "residual powers" to be restored to the Federation by the Regions. The 1953 Conference decided that these powers should remain with the Regions and this decision is still supported by the Western and Northern Regions. Moreover, the Action Group and the N.P.C., want the police, which is at present a Federal body, to be regionalised. This is a proposal which the N.C.N.C. strongly condemns. The Action Group, however, concedes that operational control of the Regional police should be vested in the Governor under self-government. This "concession" is hardly likely to appease the N.C.N.C. and its supporters. The Action Group and the N.P.C. both want a new Senate at the centre in which all the Regions will be equally represented.

A "Separate States" issue will very likely be raised by the N.C.N.C. with the N.E.P.U. giving doughty support. The N.E.P.U. urges the division of Nigeria into 15 Regions. It wants, above all, the creation of a Middle Belt region, a proposal which was advanced vigorously at the 1953 Conference without success. The Middle Belt is the name given to the southern area of the Northern Region. It is an area of considerable size populated by people who have little or nothing in common with the Hausas and Fulanis of the North and are not Moslems. The area which is partly forested includes the Bauchi plateau with its tin mines. The small opposition party, the Middle Belt Party, which came into being in 1953 is supported by emigrant Ibos living in the North, and by the N.C.N.C. and the N.E.P.U.

The N.C.N.C. advocacy of a further division of Nigeria is founded on a desire to reduce the possibility of one Region domination of the whole Federation. The party will most certainly want to keep Lagos separated from the Western Region. This separation, decided upon by Mr. Lyttelton in 1953, has always been regarded as unjust by the Action Group whose representatives will assuredly make a strong bid to have it reversed.

The Action Group also favours more states but only if "there is a majority wanting the separate state in the area concerned". Mr. Obafemi Awolowo, the Action Group leader, seems to be

convinced that there is such a majority in the Benin-Delta area now included in the Western Region and he therefore favours the establishment of a Benin-Delta state. The fact that Benin, inhabited by the Edo people, is an N.C.N.C. stronghold in the Western Region is perhaps not unconnected with Mr. Awolowo's willingness to accommodate. Rid of Benin, he would be able to consolidate the Western into a Yoruba Region.

Whatever the Conference decides, it appears it will not be able to avoid creating at least one new Region. For the delegation from the Cameroons will propose that following the separation of the territory from the Eastern Region by decision of the 1953 Conference, this year's Conference should now consider favourably the demand of the Kamerun National Congress, the main party of the area, that the Southern Cameroons should now be constituted a Region.

The issue of electoral reform will figure prominently on the conference agenda. The N.C.N.C. has long urged the need for a uniform system for Federal elections if the North's preponderance of representatives in the Federal House of Representatives is not to be resented in the South. The N.C.N.C. strictures are aimed largely at the North where, as mentioned earlier, the undemocratic character of the elections denied to the N.E.P.U. the winning of even a single seat. In the last Federal election in the North the operation of the system of multiple electoral colleges meant that although the N.E.P.U. candidates did well in the primaries, they were all defeated in the later stages, when the lists of the electors were heavily weighted in favour of the representatives of the Native Administrations. Indeed, the *Daily Times* (December 30, 1954) commented that: "One significant feature of the elections is that the successful candidates were nearly all N.A. employees".

However, it is evident, judging from some of the results in the recent Western Region election, that the need for reform does not apply to the North alone. In the May election in the West certain constituencies appear to have been unduly favoured in the matter of allocation of seats. Egbado (Action Group support) with 47,033 electors was allocated 4 seats against 3 for Benin (N.C.N.C. support) which had 89,983 electors. And Urhobo (N.C.N.C.) with 143,346 electors was given only 3 seats—the same as Benin but one fewer than Egbado although it has nearly three times the number of voters.¹

The question of British civil servants continuing to serve in the

¹ See Revised Voters' List, Western Nigeria. "Daily Times", May 5, 1956.

administration of a self-governing Nigeria will also be taken up by the Conference. In the early part of 1955, Dr. Azikiwe as Prime Minister of the Eastern Region abolished the expatriation pay of certain key British civil servants. The payment of special allowances to Government employees from overseas—expatriation pay—was deeply resented by many Eastern Nigerians who regarded it as a hangover from the old colonial practice of paying a higher salary to one of two equally qualified employees merely because he was recruited from overseas (Britain). The Regional Governor, Sir Clement Pleass, used his reserve powers of intervention to stop Dr. Azikiwe on that occasion. Since then the position of British overseas civil servants has been explained by Mr. Lennox-Boyd, the Colonial Secretary, in a Statement of Policy Regarding Organisation in Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service (H.M. Stationery Office, London). According to this Statement, a list will be prepared of those people with the necessary qualifications, who wish to be seconded to overseas governments. These officers will be in the service of the British Government in the United Kingdom and will be seconded to the employing government. At the same time where constitutional changes take place affecting fundamentally the conditions of serving officers, compensation schemes will be negotiated by the British Government with the governments concerned. In special cases, as in Nigeria, where acute staffing difficulties exist, special arrangements will be made to help create conditions which will encourage officers to remain at their posts. All the Nigerian Regional Governments have received the Secretary of State's proposals for study and they will make their views known at the Conference.

A further subject of interest will be that of revenue allocation. At present the system is based on "derivation" but the Federal Government is given some freedom of action. A serious challenge to this system will be made by the N.C.N.C. which has decided that a new system based on need should be adopted.

There is one force which may or may not be represented at the London Conference but which nevertheless has played a vital role in Nigerian affairs and promises to do so again in the near future. That force is the Nigerian trade union movement.

Trade union organisation and militancy among the Nigerian workers reached a high level in 1945, the year of the first general strike in the territory's history. Several young leaders were thrown up by the movement. However, mistakes began to be made due largely to the fact that success turned the heads of some

of the leaders and caused them to think only in terms of personal power. From the crest of the victory of 1945 the movement fell into the trough of the defeat of 1950, following which the whole movement suffered a severe set-back from which it has not yet fully recovered.

The Nigerian Labour Congress was forced to dissolve itself, disputes arose among the former leaders and there was no agreement as to the steps to be taken to reconstitute the movement.

The decisions of the London Constitutional Conference of August, 1953, presented a challenge to the trade union movement of Nigeria, and stimulated a widespread demand for the establishment of a new trade union centre. The Federal Government itself was in favour of a new trade union centre, for it was unable to exercise control over the separate trade unions and it was difficult to apply a policy common to them all. The Government was anxious to organise a central leadership under the control of its Labour Department.

However, when the inaugural conference to establish a new trade union centre was held in the autumn of 1953, the militant elements, which had been to the fore in past trade union struggles, once again won considerable influence in the new leadership.

At first the Government refused to recognise the new body, the All-Nigerian Trade Union Federation (A.N.T.U.F.). More "moderate" elements were called for at a return conference but the result was that even more militant elements gained election to the leadership.

According to official reports there are 131 trade unions in Nigeria with a total membership of 143,282. The majority of these workers are in five trade unions, ranging from a membership of 10,000 in the Railway Workers' Union, to over 26,000 in the Nigerian Union of Teachers. It appears, however, that the Teachers' Union is not a genuine trade union but a staff association.

A.N.T.U.F. claims that there are only 51 important trade unions in Nigeria and that 46 of them (excluding the N.U.T.) with a membership of 130,000 are affiliated to it. In the report for its Third Annual Conference in November, 1955, it claims an affiliated total membership of 200,000.

A.N.T.U.F. is strongly opposed to the regional division of Nigeria as it believes that this facilitates division of the workers and the trade union movement by the Government and the employers. Separate wage awards as between the regions has already forced A.N.T.U.F. to set up a regional organisation in the East.

In August, 1955, an "Eastern Labour Congress" was set up at Port Harcourt after a two-day conference of trade union representatives.

A.N.T.U.F. has as yet no international affiliation. Neither is it aligned with any of the Nigerian political parties; indeed, within its leadership there is strong opposition to any Executive members associating themselves with the national parties which are regarded as thoroughly bourgeois in character.

The A.N.T.U.F. leadership have declared that they have lost confidence in the N.C.N.C. towards which many of them were once favourably disposed. Indeed, a number are former members of the N.C.N.C. They are said to be considering the formation of a Workers' Party sponsored by A.N.T.U.F.

It is apparent that many changes require to be made in the Nigerian Constitution at the London Conference. However, such are the divisions existing between the parties that a unitary constitution seems out of the question. Nevertheless, there will have to be some arrangement establishing a division of powers on a satisfactory basis between the centre and the Regions: one that must be clearly a vast improvement on that of 1953.

Above all, the vast majority of Nigerians want to see something more than the shadow of independence emerging from the Conference. The delegates will hardly dare return home without the substance.

POLICIES AND POLITICS IN THE GOLD COAST

JOHN HATCH

In 1956 the Gold Coast is the most important nation on the African continent. It is likely to retain that significant position for some years. Why is this? Where lies this tremendous significance? The answer is surely that what happens during the next few months in this small colony of five million people will be held to prove whether or not the African Negro is capable of emerging from colonial rule to control and administer an independent, democratic state. The test is certainly not conclusive. The success or failure of the Gold Coast Africans will prove nothing of the