

NIGERIA AND TOMORROW'S AFRICA

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BETWEEN 1860 and the end of the century, various European powers carved out the African continent into spheres of influence within which they gradually came to achieve not only commercial supremacy but also political hegemony. In short, the late nineteenth-century scramble for Africa imprinted on the continent a hotch-potch pattern of political groupings such as existed in Europe. Out of these groupings have emerged the new States of Africa, each of them reflecting in diverse ways characteristics of the colonising power. Today, less than a hundred years after the scramble, international excitement has again shifted to Africa. Everywhere the cry is for independence or self-government; and within merely five years of 1955, no fewer than 12 States have become independent or self-governing.

This rapid increase in the number of newly-independent countries has had the effect of dividing Africa into two political blocs. To the north and west (except for Algeria) are countries ruled by their indigenous inhabitants. Here the Europeans form a minority, insignificant both in terms of number and political importance. To the south and east are countries where the Europeans, although still a minority, exercise important political power out of all proportion to their numbers and where the African majority is more than ever before conscious of the political rights denied it.

It is into these evolving African conditions that Nigeria is to be thrust on October 1st as the single most populous independent African State. With its population of almost 40 millions—out of a total of some 230 millions for the whole of Africa—Nigeria's premier position on the continent is almost assured. Yet its claim to leadership is unlikely to go uncontested, and it is daily becoming more patent that sheer size of population will not by itself confer a leader's rôle on the country. If Nigeria intends to assume a guiding place in Africa, it has to take its stand forcefully on the new and sometimes indeterminate political concepts current throughout the continent today.

II

The first of these concepts is that of Pan-Africanism, dating from just before the First World War when the American Negro, Dr. William DuBois, began to expound it as a political philosophy. Its real impact, however, only began to be felt after the Accra Conference of independent African States in 1958. As a political philosophy, Pan-Africanism does not lend itself to clear-cut definition. The late George Padmore analysed its essential elements as national self-determination for African States, individual liberty and democratic socialism. Judging from the pronouncements of its more recent exponents, two main ideas seem to lie behind Pan-Africanism. The first is that Africa belongs to the Africans. In this context, an African is either a member of a race as far as is known indigenous to the continent, or a member of a migrant race whose movement into Africa took place more than eight centuries ago. Thus, whilst the Arabs of North and East Africa who arrived between the seventh and twelfth centuries are regarded as Africans, the Europeans of South, East and Central Africa who moved in since the fifteenth century are not. The second idea follows from the first—that all non-Africans on the continent must either leave or be prepared to accept an inferior political position, corresponding to their numbers, in the country of their domicile.

The proponents of Pan-Africanism see the next decade as crucial, since it must witness the extension of their ideas into those areas of the continent where the European minority still wields enormous power. They realise that it will be a decade of struggles, of crisis after crisis, even of violence. Any independent African State that does not merely profess Pan-Africanism, but intends to lead others in making it a reality, must be prepared for such eventualities. Ghana, which is in the vanguard of the movement at the moment, is giving both the psychological inspiration and concrete, if modest, material aid to further the cause. It is sponsoring the growth of a Pan-African Trade Union Movement as an effective weapon for realising these ideals. Nigeria, if it is to enjoy any leadership, must be able to do more than this. It must be able to inspire Pan-Africanism with new and constructive ideas that have a good chance of early realisation.

A Nigeria prepared to assume such a rôle will have to look at the rest of the world through the spectacles of Pan-Africanism. Any non-African country which shows genuine sympathy for the cause of Pan-Africanism will thus have extended to it the right

hand of fellowship. For Nigeria to view its international political relations in this way, however, would cut across the existing world division into two power blocs, since countries which are likely to show genuine sympathy and understanding of the African situation will be found on both sides of the iron curtain. This is bound, therefore, to lead Nigeria into the camp of the positively neutral countries, such as India. In spite of this logic, one cannot ignore the persistent statements of various political leaders in the country that they profoundly prize their association with the Western powers. How these declarations can be reconciled with Pan-Africanism will doubtless depend on the attitude of the Western powers to the grave human problems in Southern Africa. If they show an eagerness to help resolve the present injustice endured by the Africans in these areas, they might find in Nigeria a willingness to pursue a foreign policy which, though neutral, still leans heavily towards the West.

An almost parallel movement to Pan-Africanism with which Nigeria will be involved is that of Negritude. This movement involves principally people of Negro origin and for a long time remained on the purely literary level. The exponents of Negritude are to be found not only within Africa itself but also in the Americas and the Caribbean and wherever there are people of Negro stock. The movement has given rise to a literature both in French and in English which seeks to give to the rest of the world an African interpretation of existence. Leading names in the movement, such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor and Alioune Diop, belong to the French-speaking West Indies and West Africa. A few Nigerian poets, writers and playwrights, such as Dennis Osadebay, are mentioned; but their writings are included more as typical of the general movement than as giving any special lead in this realm of ideas.

Out of these two concepts—Pan-Africanism and Negritude—has emerged the desire to project the African personality to the rest of the world. At the bottom of this desire is the dim feeling that the African, in re-discovering his lost dignity, has something special to teach or tell the rest of the world. Those who share this feeling are trying to give it shape and communicate it, whether in the field of international diplomacy or in matters of culture and religion. At present, what is more evident is a straining to project something, and something that is still rather elusive. Ghana, for instance, is trying to remodel Western democracy to suit what she claims to be the African condition; and only time

can show whether what is achieved affects the very substance of democracy or merely its trappings. There is as yet no indication of any Nigerian interpretations of the African personality, and the many statements on the subject by Nigerians are distinguished only by their extreme vagueness.

III

A much more immediate way in which Nigeria's position might affect the shape of tomorrow's Africa is its stand on the much-discussed union of West African States. Two schools of thought have developed in the last few years, one led by Ghana and the other by Liberia. The Ghanaian school emphasizes that for West Africa to carry much weight in the comity of nations a political union of all its component States is essential. As a profession of this conviction, the Ghanaian Government inserted a clause into the new Republican Constitution of the country providing for the submission of the country's sovereign rights to such a union whenever formed; and, as an earnest of its determination, it entered into a form of union with the Republic of Guinea when that State became independent in 1958. More recently, Lumumba has indicated a desire to see the new Republic of the Congo associated with this union.

The Liberian school of thought believes such a political union to be undesirable and bound inevitably to give rise to unnecessary problems and struggles for leadership. At any rate, such a union looks unattainable to Liberia short of military action by a West African State powerful enough to subdue all the others. Instead, therefore, she proposes a customs union of West Africa States, with increased co-operation among them in various specified fields of human endeavour.

Nigeria has nowhere yet declared which of these two schools it supports. From the enthusiasm shown during the visit of the Liberian President, one might be tempted to believe that it leans strongly towards the Liberian point of view. Yet one must not discount the presence in the country of a strong body of opinion which believes that the future of the African continent lies in the political and military might of a United States of West Africa. Nor is this belief of recent birth; it goes back to those inter-war years when students from all parts of British West Africa met in Britain or the United States to consider the future of their countries together.

Tomorrow's Africa, then, must be seen as a continent needing both political and cultural leadership. Because of the general low level of economic prosperity and technical skill everywhere, there is not likely to be any considerable economic leadership for some time to come, except where economic aid is used to further political ambitions. At this juncture, therefore, we may ask what particular advantages Nigeria possesses for continental leadership.

A major advantage, of course, is Nigeria's population. A nation that can speak with the voice of 40 million people is one that must command a hearing. But for this potential strength to be translated into practical politics requires the emergence of a national leader, and one who must possess particular attributes. Within the country he must provide in his person the rallying point for all that is progressive in the national aspirations. On the international plane, he must be a leader possessed of enough imagination to appreciate the vital rôle of Nigeria in shaping the future of Africa. Above all, he must have the unflinching courage to pursue the path which the appreciation of this duty dictates in the face of opposition from the fairly powerful conservative element in the country.

Such a leader is still far from coming onto the stage. Up to now, the essentially regional slant of Nigeria's three main political parties has provided obstacles; while the nature of the present Federal Government has hardly been conducive to the emergence of such a personality. This Government, a coalition between the conservative Northern Peoples' Congress (N.P.C.) and the more progressive National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.) is—like all coalitions—a government of compromise, in which the more extreme policies of both parties tend to be thrown overboard.

IV

The absence of a forceful and imaginative Federal Government has accordingly left the thinking about Nigeria's rôle in Africa largely in the hands of private organisations made up of intellectuals, professionals, labour leaders and various youth bodies. The lack of co-ordination among these different groups, however, has blunted the impact that they would assuredly otherwise have had. Nonetheless, it must be counted to their credit that during the Sharpeville crisis in South Africa they succeeded in influencing the Federal Government towards the strongest state-

ments of hostility to the actions of the South African Government.

V

In spite of all this, there are three ways in which Nigeria might substantially influence the shape of the new Africa. The first springs from the very weakness of the country at present—its federal system of government. The emergence of really powerful and nation-wide political parties, with nationally known and acclaimed leaders, may not be as far in the future as the gloomy suggest. And in a continent whose peoples belong to thousands of different tribes, an enforced unitary system of government might give rise to more problems than it solves. It has been asserted by many political observers that if the Belgian Congo had opted for a federal rather than a centralised system of government, some of its grave political problems still awaiting solution might not have arisen in the first place. At any rate, if the constitutional development of Nigeria can be seen as evolutionary and if the country can make a success of federalism which, by its very nature, seems to weaken the chances of any dictator's emerging, the country may yet become a real bulwark of democracy in a continent many fear may crumble one day into small dictatorships.

The second form Nigerian influence may take is over the issue of West African Union. As mentioned earlier, the present leaders of the country seem to side with the Liberian school of thought, choosing co-operation among West African States rather than a political union. Some of the leaders are, however, prepared to accept that such co-operation may be the first step on a ladder leading ultimately to political union. After independence, Nigeria will have to decide on the scope and strength of this co-operation. If all that is envisaged is co-operation on the old lines, institutions such as the West African Airways, West African Currency Board, West African Institute of Cocoa Research and various other semi-governmental organizations, the result will be hardly noticeable. For greater effect, Nigeria must conceive of co-operation on a much more extensive and high-powered plane. There are two fields especially in which the effect of such a new conception of co-operation can be made decisive.

The first is the economic field. Most of the exponents of inter-State co-operation talk in terms of a customs union and the removal of artificial political barriers to the free movement of

people from one part of West Africa to another. Nigeria can go one step further and promote the concept of West Africa as a single economic region. Nigeria's coal, for instance, which is at present finding only a small domestic market, can be diverted to supply the needs of those parts of French West Africa which now import their coal from Europe. The total effect of such a move would be to create a common market of some 80 million people for produce from all parts of West Africa. To realise such an ambition, Nigeria must spear-head a movement for a unified and improved system of transportation—not only between the interior and the coast, but also from one part of West Africa to another. It must also encourage the free movement of capital and labour over the whole of West Africa.

The second field in which the country can provide a lead is military. For if history can provide any guide, it is that a militarily strong country commands more respect from the rest of the world than one which is weak, while military strength is known to be sufficient deterrent to any aggressor. Nigeria should therefore champion a move towards a West African defensive alliance which would guarantee the integrity of the whole sub-continent against enemy attack. This idea would prove fruitful in another sense. Since for some years to come, West African countries must depend for military armaments upon outside sources, the presence of a unified military control should simplify the purchase and handling of equipment.

And this brings us to the final way in which Nigeria may influence the shape of tomorrow's Africa. So far, Nigeria's positive contributions to the cause of Pan-Africanism have been meagre in the extreme. Yet this need not always be so. Nigeria, especially if it can realise those economic and military ends in West Africa previously outlined, can promote the declaration of something like a Monroe Doctrine, opposing any foreign intervention in the political affairs of the African continent. From a position of strength, it could regard as an infringement of her sovereignty any violation of the integrity of any African State.

Still lacking, however, would be some solution to race tyranny in South and Central Africa; and this task, fraught as it is with enormous difficulties, would have to be faced not only with courage but with great imagination. The three and a half million or so Europeans who have made their homes in this southern half of the continent cannot be expected to pack their baggage and depart. And yet, conditions in these places are such

that the present rule by race of the many by the few, cannot be allowed to continue.

The greatest test for Nigerian statesmen, in fact for all African statesmen during the next few years, will be the improvement of human relations in South and Central Africa without the dangers of economic and political chaos. The white minority who are still in power are, of course, the people from whom a change must be compelled. The economic pressure now being exerted on the South African Government must accordingly be seen as a means rather than as an end in itself. The objective must remain not the expulsion of the European from Africa, but the establishment of non-racial communities where white-dominated ones at present exist—societies where the rule of law will be guaranteed irrespective of race, and liberty and equality no longer made conditional on colour.

Nigeria's vital rôle in bringing this about will lie in its interpretation of Pan-Africanism. If it can help to expand the scope of this concept to embrace all those living in Africa irrespective of race, colour or creed, it will make an invaluable contribution to world peace and to the shape and destiny of tomorrow's Africa.

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