

Nigeria's Path to Independence

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DURING the celebrations of Nigerian independence on October 1st, both British and Nigerian leaders indulged in a loud chorus of praise for the path of "peaceful co-operation" by which they claim this had been achieved. Two days before Nigerian independence Mr. Macmillan spoke at the General Assembly of the United Nations, and, referring to the former British colonies which had won their independence, declared:

"Those of us who have helped them forward to nationhood feel that we too have the right to feel proud. For we have been working with the people of these countries, to help them to realise their aspirations for peace, independence, prosperity, and individual freedom" (29.9.60).

The Federal Premier of Nigeria (Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa) spoke warmly on Independence Day, of the good relations between Britain and Nigeria, who had been "partners and always good friends". Dr. M. Okpara (who succeeded Dr. Azikwe as Premier in the Eastern Region) repeated a phrase used by Zik himself that Nigeria had been handed independence "on a golden platter". And Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto (who is Premier of the Northern Region) had already assured Mr. Macmillan last January that: "Never had a people progressed so smoothly and so quickly from dependence to independence."

Chief Awolowo, leader of the Action Group, has testified that "Britain may be justly proud of its record in Nigeria", giving the assurance: "We are nationalists. But we are not extremists. We have journeyed to the eve of independence in peace".

Determined to join this chorus of praise by Nigeria's three main political leaders for the generous "gift" of Nigerian political independence handed out by the kind Tory Government, James Callaghan (Labour's Shadow Colonial Secretary), speaking at the Scarborough Conference, described Nigeria as ". . . a great state where thirty million people moved quickly, purposefully and without a ripple to self-government."

From all these declarations one could hardly believe that the Nigerian peoples themselves had done anything to win their political independence. Yet, the national movement was growing in Nigeria for many decades, long before it was developed in other African countries. The conception of self-government was expressed in the Lagos

Times as early as March 1881, in these words:

"The present order of things will not last for ever. The time will come when the British colonies on the west coast will be left to regulate their own internal and external affairs."

Long Battle for Freedom

This prophecy was made eighty years ago, but it took a long time to come! Nigeria was not "left to regulate" its "own internal and external affairs". Colonial wars were waged after 1881 to complete the British conquest of those territories now known as the Federation of Nigeria. They went on for nearly forty years, even after the whole of Nigeria was brought in 1914 under one British administration. The military victories paved the way for the speeding up of the economic exploitation of Nigeria, with the key ownership and control of British overseas monopoly firms (as they still are today) and the expansion of trade in the hands of British concerns.

In 1920 was formed the National Congress of West Africa by J. E. Casely-Hayford, famous lawyer and journalist, and I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, outstanding pioneer of national freedom in West Africa. Then came the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party in 1922 by Herbert Macaulay, father of Nigerian nationalism. This created a fruitful soil for a continuous crop of progressive and youth movements for fourteen years after 1923, culminating with the Nigeria Youth Movement in 1937, which declared that:

"The principal aim of the National Youth Movement is the development of a united nation out of the agglomeration of the peoples who inhabit Nigeria."

The biggest step forward was the creation of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.) in August 1944, founded by Herbert Macaulay and Dr. Azikwe. The next ten years was a decade of sharp struggles—a successful general strike in 1945, a nation-wide campaign in 1946-7 against an imposed British constitution, a national crusade in 1949 against the shooting of Enugu coal miners by orders of a British officer, a new constitutional breakdown in 1951, the crisis which arose with the British Lieutenant-Governor dissolving the Eastern Assembly in 1953, and then a succession of constitutional conferences in London during the past seven years.

These are but a summary of the main episodes of the variety of forms which the national struggle has taken in Nigeria in the past twenty years. True, the actual *achievement* of Nigerian political independence in 1960 was relatively peaceful and constitutional, but *only because past Nigerian struggles had made it clear to the British ruling class that there was no alternative but to concede independence.*

Nor was Nigerian independence something that was suddenly decided. As early as 1957 regional self-government was achieved in the eastern and western regions of Nigeria, and in the northern region in March 1959. Nigerian independence was something of a piece-meal business, and the October 1st celebrations were, in fact, almost an anti-climax compared with the joyous celebrations at the time of Ghana independence in March 1957.

Divide and Rule

The skilful use of the divide-and-rule strategy of British imperialism not only succeeded in delaying Nigerian independence, but also in winning the willing co-operation of the Nigerian political leaders in varying degrees. The end product of this long process is a Nigerian coalition government in which the main partner is a conservative party dominated still by feudal interests, and which the British ruling class hope to rely upon.

How has it been possible to achieve this? The answer lies in the history of Nigeria, its unique pattern of 248 different languages, the varying stages of development from feudalism in the north to the growth of capitalism in the south, the destructive character of the regional system imposed by British rule, and the successful British strategy in exploiting this to divide the Nigerian peoples.

First of all, what is Nigeria? It is four times the size of Britain, with an official estimated population of thirty-five million—but more likely in the region of forty million. This is more than the total population of the remaining British colonial empire. From 1914 to 1946 it remained under a single British administration, with a Legislative Council from 1922 onwards for Southern Nigeria (covering what is now the eastern and western regions) but the north ruled directly by the British Governor. Of the forty-six members of the southern Legislative Council, only four were elected—three from Lagos (the capital) and one from Calabar.

Southern Nigeria was more advanced, economically and politically, than the north. Until 1944 the various progressive movements were largely confined to Lagos. From its formation in 1944 the N.C.N.C. strove to become a nation-wide

movement. True, it was yet unable to dig deep roots in the north, but it held considerable sway throughout the south, which now includes the eastern and western regions.

Faced with this prospect of progressive ideas spreading throughout Nigeria and uniting its peoples, the British Government struck a deadly blow to divide Nigeria. The first step was the enforcement of a new constitution by Sir Arthur Richards, the British Governor (now Lord Milverton) which divided the country into three separate and artificial regions—north, east, and west. These divisions were confirmed and consolidated in the succeeding Macpherson Constitution of 1951.

The northern region comprises 77 per cent of Nigeria's total area and nearly 66 per cent of its population. Of its twenty million people most of them are Moslems, of whom six million are Hausas, and the Fulanis over three-and-a-half million. Not only is it the most backward from the standpoint of economic development, it is also largely under the political domination of the Fulani emirs. These feudal rulers control the "native authorities" which form the administration in the north. Under British rule these native authorities were retained as instruments of "indirect rule", together with the promotion of the Fulani emirs into highly-paid civil servants.

Highest economic development is in the western region, which produces all Nigeria's cocoa—the most prosperous aspect of the country's economy. It has also a major share in Nigeria's trade. Most numerous of its peoples (seven million) are the Yorubas, who number 5,500,000. Its system of chieftaincy has deep roots in history, but its Yoruba Obas (chiefs) are traditional monarchs, whose power is subject to a council of the heads of the ruling chieftain families. Succession is not far from father to son, but amongst a group of chieftain families, and instead of being sole authority the Chief's position is that of Chief-in-Council. Though they have big influence they are closer to the people and cannot exercise dictatorial powers like the northern emirs. Some of them are big cocoa farmers and also closely associated with large-scale trade.

The east is the smallest region, but with a bigger population than the larger western region. Of its eight million peoples more than six million are Ibos. It has no feudal rulers, no traditional chiefs, nor any system of "native authorities". In this sense it was different from the other two regions. Under British rule, an attempt was made to institute paid "warrant chiefs" so as to create an "authority" over the people, but faced with strong resistance the attempt was a failure. The east did not have

the economic advantages of the west, and many Ibo people had to find an outlet in other regions. But besides coal for domestic use, in recent years oil production has started in this region, and in many respects there is now rapid economic development.

Rival Political Movements

Why is this background so important? Because it serves to explain how it was possible for the regional system, enforced in 1946, to exploit these differences. At that time, the N.C.N.C. was the only organised expression of the rising national movement, and it waged a nation-wide campaign against it, ending with a protest delegation to London in 1947 to the Labour Government. But the new Constitution was forced through, and so began the deliberate process of dividing the Nigerian peoples. With the breakdown of the Richards' Constitution in 1950, a new Constitution was put forward by Sir John Macpherson, the succeeding British Governor. The first nation-wide elections were held in 1951, based on an undemocratic system of electoral colleges, involving three stages in the east and west, and four or five stages in the north.

By now the regional system had taken root, and had given rise to the formation of political parties based on narrow regional interests. In the north it was the Northern Peoples Congress (N.P.C.) which came into being to protect the interests of the feudal emirs and big landlords. It was opposed by the Northern Elements Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.) which champions the cause of the peasantry, workers, small farmers, and the progressive elements among the intelligentsia—and which is an ally of the N.C.N.C.

In the west, there was already formed in 1948, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba cultural organisation. It was the spearhead in the formation of the Action Group, formed in 1951, which became the spokesman for distinct Yoruba interests, for the big cocoa-farmers and large-scale traders. It became a rival to the N.C.N.C., mainly in the west, but also extended its activity to the east. The N.C.N.C. leaders also expressed the opposition of the small but growing national bourgeoisie in the east (and the west) and Dr. Azikwe himself owns a chain of newspapers.

Though the leadership of the three main parties gave expression in the north to feudal interests, and in the east and west to the interests of a growing bourgeoisie, in their respective regions they won mass support among the Nigerian peoples.

In the 1951 election the N.P.C. won the overwhelming majority in the Northern Assembly, led

by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello (the Sardauna of Sokoto), descendant of an outstanding feudal monarch. In the Eastern Assembly the N.C.N.C., led by Dr. Azikwe, won a sweeping majority. In the Western Assembly the Action Group, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, won a small majority over the N.C.N.C. Though many changes have taken place in nine years, and in the scope of the franchise, these political parties still hold the majority of seats in their respective regional assemblies.

The 1951 elections results provided just the situation most desired in British ruling circles. It was the most favourable relation of forces in which to apply their strategy of divide and rule—and for seven years they applied it with a vengeance, until in 1958, they could no longer resist the united demands of all Nigerian political parties for independence in 1960.

It is too long a story to relate the twists and turns in the succession of Nigerian constitutional conferences (about six of them) from July 1953 to May 1960. Even at the first one there was a joint demand by the N.C.N.C. and Action Group for Nigerian self-government in 1956. The British excuse was that the north was not ready for this, but that regional self-government would be conceded in 1956 "for those regions which desired it", but only providing this "did not infringe upon the functions of the Federal Government".

However, the position in the Federal Assembly was changed after the 1954 elections. Though the N.P.C. won the biggest number of seats, the N.C.N.C. won the majority of seats in both east and west. As each region was entitled to three seats in the Council of Ministers (and one for Cameroons), this gave the N.C.N.C. six out of ten seats in the Council of Ministers, but a minority of seats in the Assembly.

This was certainly not anticipated by the British Government. So when one of the N.C.N.C. leaders later deserted and started a smear campaign against the alleged dishonest methods of Dr. Azikwe in relation to the affairs of the African Continental Bank, Mr. Lennox Boyd (then Colonial Secretary) lost no time in appointing a Commission of Inquiry. In its report there was a mild rebuke to Dr. Azikwe, who then organised new elections for the Eastern Assembly to test his position, and again won a big majority.

Unity for Independence

However, this meant postponing the 1956 London constitutional conference, as also regional self-government in the east and west. This came in 1957, and by that time the N.P.C. could not resist the rising pressure of the Nigerian peoples.

Not only did the N.P.C. decide to plan for regional self-government in the north in March 1959, but also joined with the other two parties in the demand for Nigerian independence in April 1959.

At the 1957 conference, Lennox-Boyd was now faced with a united Nigerian demand for independence. The argument about the north "not being ready" was no longer valid. What saved the situation for Lennox-Boyd was the insistence of the Action Group on the creation of new regions *before* Nigerian independence was achieved, which would have created new barriers between peoples of the same language. This aroused keen conflicts between the political parties and provided a pretext for Lennox-Boyd to postpone, still further, the date for Nigerian independence. After this rebuff, the new all-Nigerian demand was for independence in April 1960, but the British Government still refused, though finally it was forced to concede independence on October 1st, 1960—conditional upon new Federal elections in December 1959.

In the Federal elections last December, the dice were loaded in favour of the Northern Peoples Congress. The north was allocated 172 seats (56 per cent) out of a total of 312. True, the northern area and population is more than 56 per cent of the whole of Nigeria, but women were denied the vote, so that the total *electors* in the north were in a minority. Moreover, the grip of the feudal emirs on the native authorities, and the respective measures against opposing parties, made it comparatively easy for the N.P.C. to get its majority in the north.

However, no single party won a majority for the whole of Nigeria. The N.P.C. gained 142 seats, N.C.N.C. and its ally N.E.P.U. 89 seats, and the Action Group 73 seats. The outcome was a coalition government of the N.P.C. and N.C.N.C. with the Action Group as the official Opposition, and Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa remaining Federal Prime minister.

Nigeria's Economy

Before the next elections in December 1964, many things can happen. Already there is a new political ferment growing within *all* the Nigerian political parties. It is realised that the new Nigeria is faced with big and serious problems, and it would not be surprising if new political forces (and parties) emerged before the next elections.

What are the main problems facing Nigeria? First, there is the problem of its backward economy. Though seven times larger than Ghana, it is a poorer country. Ghana's annual income per head is over £50 (low enough!) but Nigeria's is

only £30. Nigeria's economy is still based mainly on agriculture and the production of primary products. In the north, main products are cotton and groundnuts, and tin in the central plateau; in the west it is cocoa mainly, but also rubber, and now the prospect of oil; in the east it is palm oil and kernels, coal on a modest scale, and now oil production will soon reach a million tons a year.

There is a considerable sprinkling of secondary industries in all three regions, but no heavy industry, engineering, or machine-producing plants. In essence, it is still a colonial economy in the grip of big European overseas firms—mainly British. Profits of United Africa Company (subsidiary of Unilever) went up from £47 million in 1955 to £60 million in 1958. Shell Oil has invested £70 million in the east, and will expect to get big profits in return. British firms (twenty-one of them) own the tin mines, and are active in other spheres.

Economic investigations in 1949 estimated that 85 per cent of Nigerian trade was in the hands of European firms, 10 per cent Levantine and Asian firms, and only 5 per cent handled by African traders. It has long been the boast of the United Africa Company that it handles more than one-third of West Africa's total trade.

Economic Planning

Clearly, the first big task is to transform Nigeria's backward economy. This is not only a matter of economic planning, but also of foreign relations. It will possibly get small loans from Britain, and U.S. imperialism is likely to penetrate Nigeria on a bigger scale. Much will depend on its relations with other independent African states, but also on its willingness to enter into trading relations with the socialist countries. If Nigeria keeps to its old pattern of economy and trading relations its political independence will mean little in the lives of the ordinary people.

In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the volume of Nigeria's trade with Britain, and an upward trend with Japan and West Germany. Last year 35 per cent of Nigeria's exports went to the six countries of the European common market. The strong grip of British financial circles has by no means prevented the expansion of Nigerian trade elsewhere, and after political independence Nigeria's trade with countries *outside* the Commonwealth is likely to grow even more.

From the standpoint of economic planning there seems to be more emphasis on the regional plans than the five-year economic plan for the whole of Nigeria. The disproportion between the regions is likely to become more serious, for the capital investment plan in the west for 1960-61 is £16

million, in the east only £6 million, and in the north £10 million. This means the west (only one-sixth the area and population) will spend as much as the other five-sixths. Indeed, in *The Times Supplement* (and elsewhere) on Independence Day it was the separate regions which had the biggest advertisements on the opportunities for foreign investments, and publicity on a Federal level was far in the background.

This regional separatism is also a serious obstacle in the struggle for uniform wage rates in Nigeria and for a united trade union movement. The daily minimum for labourers in government service in the west was recently raised from 5s. 6d. to 5s. 10d; in the east it is 5s.; and in the north round about 3s. No wonder the trade unions are in the forefront against the existing regional system.

Just as the British strategy of regionalism divided Nigeria so has the I.C.F.T.U. and the General Council of the British T.U.C. done its utmost to divide the Nigerian trade unions. From the formation of the Nigerian T.U.C. in 1942, there was an upward trend in strike struggles. This included the successful general strike in 1945 and the big strike victory of August 1950. But with the defeat of the mercantile workers' strike in December 1950, the government and the employers took the offensive against the workers and the trade unions, which to a large extent were broken up.

It was not until 1954 that the Nigerian trade unions regained their strength with the formation of the All-Nigerian Trade Union Federation (A.N.T.U.F.) led by Michael Imoudo (pioneer of Nigerian trade unionism) and Gogo Nzeribe, the General Secretary. But from the time of its formation, the I.C.F.T.U. and the General Council of the British T.U.C. were persistent in their efforts to prevent this growing unity. The A.N.T.U.F. entered into negotiations with the dissident elements and did succeed in reaching agreement with the formation of a united Nigerian T.U.C.

However, this only served to stimulate the I.C.F.T.U. and the General Council of the British T.U.C. into further disruptive activity, which ended in the formation of a rival trade union centre. So there are now two trade union centres in Nigeria—the *militant* Nigerian T.U.C. and the *reactionary* T.U.C. of Nigeria. The great majority of trade unionists are organised in the militant Nigerian T.U.C., but these divisions in the movement are still a serious obstacle to united action.

If the new Nigeria is to advance towards greater economic independence and higher living standards a united trade union movement is an essential step. And to achieve this, there needs to be in Britain, as well as in Nigeria, the strongest opposi-

tion to interference by the I.C.F.T.U. and the British T.U.C.—and every encouragement for the Nigerian trade unions to join with the proposed All-African Federation of Trade Unions.

Present Trends

What are the future prospects? The existing coalition government is an unstable alliance of the conservative N.P.C. and the more radical N.C.N.C., and the N.P.C. as the strongest partner is able to exercise the biggest influence on policy. Despite this, mass pressure is making itself felt. During the December elections it was only the N.C.N.C. which stood for a foreign policy of "non-alignment". The N.P.C. and the Action Group both advocated alliance with the West. Since then they have been won over to non-alignment, so that on this issue there is now agreement between the three parties.

Nigerian indignation against French atomic tests in the Sahara last year was so strong that the Federal Government (until recently) was obliged to apply a boycott of French goods. There is deep hatred of the "apartheid" system, so that the government is still enforcing a boycott of South African goods, and even threatens to vote for the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth. And Nigeria's first vote in the United Nations was for discussion of the admission of the People's Republic of China.

On all these issues the new Nigeria is certainly not in tune with British policy. On the other hand, a pledge was already given in May 1960 that: "Each country will afford the other assistance in mutual defence" and "staging facilities for aircraft in their respective territories". The Federal Premier denies this implies a British military base in Nigeria, but the proposed "staging facilities" may well be linked up with British military bases in the Southern Cameroons, Kenya, and Southern Rhodesia.

Already there is growing opposition to this military commitment—the precise terms of which are still to be defined in the Federal Assembly. So also there is strong criticism both by the N.C.N.C. and Action Group of the role of the United Nations in the Congo—in striking contrast to the praise given recently by the Federal Premier. An N.C.N.C. statement on September 15th declared "the present role of the United Nations in the appalling debacle in which the Republic of Congo is plunged" as "*poor, regrettable, and shockingly deplorable*" and that this "raised serious doubts in our minds as to whether the peoples of Africa can any longer expect justice from that organisation".

Also, in contrast to the N.P.C. both the Action Group and the N.C.N.C. (in varying degrees)

declare that "democratic socialism" is their ultimate aim. In the immediate situation they favour a "mixed economy" and their programmes suffer from Social Democratic illusions. All the same, the fact that socialism is declared as their aim *does* serve to stimulate discussions on socialist theory and to awaken an interest in Marxist ideas.

There are already indications of Socialist discussion groups being formed in five big towns—Enugu and Port Harcourt in the east, Ibadan in the west, Kano in the north, and in Lagos, the capital. Among other objectives they have defined their aims as:

To provide a rallying ground for the many socialist youths and intellectuals scattered all over the country.

To spread socialist ideas and policies through lectures, discussion seminars, newspaper articles, pamphlets, etc.

To encourage its members to canvass socialist ideas and policies *within* the various political parties and trade unions to which they may belong.

Earlier attempts were made to form progressive movements based on Marxist principles, first in

1952 with the Committee for People's Independence which later became transformed into the United Working People's Party. This went out of existence in 1956 due to two main reasons: (1) Severe repression and refusal of employment to "suspected Communists"; (2) a rigid sectarian attitude to the main political parties (even to the N.C.N.C.) which led to isolation from the national movement.

What is positive about these new developments is that the Socialist discussion groups include many well-known leaders in *all* the Nigerian political parties, providing a real basis for the growth of a united progressive movement for the whole of Nigeria.

Similar progressive trends were revealed at a National Youth Conference held in September, and it seems clear that socialist ideas are spreading among the Nigerian youth. If these new movements can bring together the best elements in all the existing political parties, it does appear that new opportunities will arise to create a real united movement which can become the spearhead for big advances in Nigeria.