

Political Unrests and Agitational Politics of Decolonization in Eastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The title of this paper is Political Unrests, and Agitational Politics Unrests of decolonization in Eastern Nigeria. The study is aimed at asserting the view of the liberal nationalist school of thought which is conjectured that sometimes internal dissent and colonial unrest may result in a revolution that hastens the independence of a colony. The position of the liberal nationalist tradition which has been adopted in this paper puts the indigenous people at the centre of decolonization from a reluctant metropolitan power as opposed to the dependentista school of thought.*

Keywords: *Agitational Politics, Political Unrests, Nationalism and Decolonization*

I. INTRODUCTION

The demands of equality, egalitarianism, representative government and constitutionalism in eastern Nigeria was in response of the socialist challenges from Eastern Europe. Also demanded were many other elements of liberal democratic principles which were more of the fundamental rights of the indigenous people of the eastern provinces of Nigeria. The efforts of the British colonial administration to initiate some reforms during the period of 1943-50 witnessed widespread hostile reactions against the colonial administration by some nationalist politicians, mercantile class, Ex-serviceman, members of the Zikist movement etc.

This liberal-Nationalist interpretation seeks to place the indigenous people of Eastern Nigeria at the centre of decolonization from a reluctant metropolitan power as opposed to the view of those of the dependentista Thesis. Advocates of the latter, the dependentista school of thought presuppose that considerations of policies of decolonization were partly British inspiration and that the rising tide of African nationalism notwithstanding, until efforts by the colonial office (CO) have reached advanced stage. Their concept of transfer of power to the indigenous people of Eastern Nigeria was a calculated scheme or design by the metropolitan power to rid itself of the cost and stigma of direct colonialism. This argument is based on the realization that the economy of any society is the nursery or seed-bed of human progress. As it would be illustrated subsequently the period covered by this paper (1943 – 51) was marred by political unrests and disturbances. (Addison, 1980:15)

Besides, the so-called reforms especially in the Native Authority and Native Court System were seen to be merely cosmetic, a type of smoke-screen aimed at perpetuating colonial rule in Eastern Nigeria.

Given the foregoing, there were widespread unrests both industrial and political. Although the industrial unrest was intermingled with politics of decolonization, it had been directed for the purpose of obtaining large increase in wages without a corresponding increase in productivity. The fallacy which appeared to have taken hold in the minds of the mercantile class, nationalist politicians and trade unionists of Eastern Nigeria was that employers, particularly the colonial government possessed resources that were unlimited and that a greater share in these resources could be obtained merely by precipitating strike actions. In doing so, the local employees of Eastern provinces ignored the fact that there was a strong economic bond between wages and output.

The political unrests had been of two kinds. There had been clashes between clans and communities as a result of jealousies based mainly on economic causes such as fishing right and the use of land. These manifested in the form of ethnic animosities sometimes expressed with primitive instincts. These were noticeable between the Kalabari and the Okrika, the Ogoni and the Andoni; the Tiv in Benue Provinces and the Obudu in the Ogoja provinces, Onitsha Obosi land disputes. Further disturbances took place between the Oguta and Onitsha, Calabar and other communities of the Okon of Bende and Akwa Division details of which would be demonstrated subsequently. The second aspect of political unrests had been on the heels of agitational politics of decolonization. These were mostly of a destructive nature as they were aimed at hindering the process of colonial government and usurping authority unconstitutionally by the members of the Zikist movement. The unrest also centered round the establishment of Pioneer Oil Mills by the Regional Production Development Board. Fantastic propaganda were spread around by some men with the aim of blinding the people to reason. It was to enable the agitators for decolonization to further their political ambitions or satisfy their own selfish ends.

Consequently, the scale of unrest during the period made it necessary for the colonial administration to increase the number of police in the region to 2,163. It provided approximately one Policeman for every 2,700 head of population whereas in the United Kingdom (the metropolis) on the other hand according to statistics, there was

one Policeman to every 600 head of population. Against this background, Eastern Nigeria became a Police state when the Region's Police Force was increased from 2,163 to a round figure of 2,800. (Hansard, 1956:6)

II. THE SOURCES OF GRIEVANCES IN EASTERN NIGERIA

As far back as 1936 rumblings of incipient Nationalist feelings was heard when Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe published some anti-colonial articles deemed by the colonial government to be seditious in "The African-morning post". He also drafted "The Position Paper", which the editors presented to the colonial office. It was entitled "The Atlantic Charter and the British West Africa". It was a remarkable document of reforms. Thus, it boldly demanded for a time table for the transfer of power to the Nationalist Politicians. It stressed social equality and communal welfare and presented a detailed series of demands for social and economic development to form a base for future constitutional development along lines of democratic advance in rural, municipal and central government. This paper stirred up sentiment against the colonial government in the Eastern provinces. According to Richards Sklar;

The right of self-determination as proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter was interpreted by the Nationalists of British West Africa as a promise of self-determination. (Sklar:1980)

This perception of the declaration of the Atlantic Charter led to the intensification of the Nationalist struggle in Eastern Nigeria. The struggle was weakened by the facts that various movements were in disarray. Thus the crisis in the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) adversely affected the strategy of the Nationalist struggle.

III. THE TENURE OF GOVERNOR ARTHUR RICHARDS

The tenure of Governor Arthur Richards (1939 – 48) represented a period of tribulation for the Nationalist Politicians Nationwide. According to a source Arthur Richards was high handed and uncompromising. His style provoked a chain of reaction associated from the start of his tenure with his unwillingness to discuss a review of the cost of living allowance popularly known as at the time as COLA.

Coupled with the foregoing, in 1944 the students of Kings College Yaba Lagos, Nigeria were on strike. Richard's reaction was the conscription of the ring leaders. This was seen by the Nationalist Politicians as high handed on his part. They were therefore determined to close ranks with the masses to hammer out Political Organisation, which could co-ordinate, and spearhead the answer to the threat posed by the Colonial Government.

The Kings College episode was hardly over when in March 1945 Sir Arthur Richards generated another crisis by introducing without consultation what later formed the essential part of his constitution. It was not only autocratic in nature but also designed to create false impression of providing for an unofficial majority in the legislative council. This constitution was fashioned out by the London government in collaboration with the colonial officials. Richard's unpopularity with the Nationalist Politicians also emanated from his turning the Regional legislative council to a mere advisory and consultative body without any legislative power, autonomy or even the power to appropriate revenue.

The reason for this was that the British believed that the march of men towards their freedom could be guided, but not halted. Of course there were risks in moving quickly but the risks of moving slowly were greater. Apart from that most of the British Bureaucrats in Eastern Nigeria were ambitious soldiers short of their career in the stagnant hierarchies of European military promotion, small entrepreneurs with dreams of grandeur. Some of them were disinherited younger sons of the rising middle class and landed gentry. This class of British officials during the tenure of Arthur Richards feared the Nationalist Politicians. This made interaction with the British official difficult. They (the British) resisted the Nationalist politicians because they hated the whole idea of colonial independence and the issue of Nigerianisation of the civil service. This was the origin of the six week general strike in 1945. (Davidson, 1964:76)

IV. THE FORMATION OF ETHNIC UNIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The 1940s was a period of quickening tempo. This manifested in the form of primary school leavers pouring out of schools at accelerating pace and looking for clerical jobs which did not exist. Primary school teachers who like school teachers everywhere considered themselves under paid. Wage earners have learnt to expect an annual increase in wages irrespective of what happened to productivity. Farmers wanted high prices for their crops including the unemployed youths leaving the rural areas for the towns than the towns could provide jobs. Besides, a new trend appeared featuring the Development of Socio-cultural and welfare groups such as the Ibo State Union of 1934 led by S.E. Onwu the first Ibo Medical Doctor. There were the Ibibio Cultural Organisation led by Udo Udoma, of the Ijaw league (now Ijaw National Congress) perhaps led by Harold Dappa Biriye and the Ogoni State Representative Assembly (OSRA) with Paul Timothy Birabi as the leader. (Anene, 1957)

By 1944 militant Nationalism could no longer be appeased. The factor that shaped events in Nigeria during this period up to the present was the evolution and development of Political Parties. Thus, on June 10, 1944 the Nigerian Union of Students (NUS) convened a mass meeting in the Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos to consider first, the Kings College strike, second, the possibility of raising funds for a national school and the immediate formation of a representative National Committee. Before then Herbert Macaulay sometimes called the father of Nigerian Nationalism had founded the first modern party as early as 1923; the N.N.D.P. based in Lagos. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe had already founded the national Youth Movement (N.Y.M) along with Earnest Ikoli. But then, these parties were limited to politics of the educated in Lagos. This time, there was the urge to turn away from the old system of politics of the educated that asked for increase in members of the legislative representation to that of agitational politics of decolonization. Thus the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was to be renamed the National Council of Nigerian Citizens in 1954 when Southern Cameroon ceased to be part of Eastern Nigeria.

At its inception Herbert Macaulay was the president and Nnamdi Azikiwe became the Secretary. It is important to call attention to the fact that at its inception, ethnic socio-cultural welfare unions particularly those mentioned above registered as members of the NCNC. By this time the NCNC had a simple manifesto without an elaborate constitution. The manifesto was merely geared towards the goal of self-government and the unity of people of Nigeria.

In 1946, the NCNC went on a grand tour of the country. They published a long list of the places they proposed to visit. They also spent £13,000 on the purchase of a lorry to take them there. Their aim was to abrogate the Richards constitution with particular reference to the four obnoxious ordinances namely, land acquisition by the crown government, public collection mineral, deposition of chiefs and matters relating to the regions.

The hue and cry, which followed the constitution, was terrible. Dissent voices sounded and resounded from the press such as the Lagos weekly record owned by Herbert Macaulay, the West African Pilot and Daily Comet owned by Nnamdi Azikiwe. These papers were used as weapons of attack against the colonial press, the Daily service. The indigenous press was an instrument for the political education for the citizenry as well as the mobilization of Nigeria to fight for independence.

The Nationalist Politicians also went round the country to assert that the substance of their clamour consisted in the inadequacy of the provision in the Richards constitution to hasten self-government for the Eastern and Western Regions. Their aim was also to tour round to renew their mandate and to secure acceptance of their Freedom Charter so that they could present it to government as the will of the people. This was in accordance with the appointment of a committee of Lagos Council to consider further constitution advance by April 1947.

Herbert Macaulay died on 7 May 1946 as a result of the fall he had in Kano while on the campaign. Nnamdi Azikiwe became the President of the party. At a point there was a cabinet crisis within the party. The disputes arose over who was to go on the delegation to London in 1947. Ogedemgbe Macaulay the son of Herbert Macaulay was anxious to go but no one was anxious to take him. Meanwhile, Nnamdi Azikiwe struck consternation in the hearts of his followers by saying that he had spent too much time gadding about and that he wanted to stay at home to look after his business.

Consequently, there was a cabinet crisis within the party. Some resigned and some were sacked. It was now very difficult to say who was in the cabinet or who was out of it. However, the members were always turning up for meeting. By this time, Nnamdi Azikiwe had got no supporters of any substance or ability in Lagos. In order to keep up the force of his cabinet he had surrounded himself with irresponsible young men who were out to make trouble. This was the origin of the Zikist movement of whom much would be discussed subsequently.

Arthur Richard was so worried about the NCNC delegation's effective campaign that he undertook to tour several of the places visited by the NCNC leaders to counteract what he described as "propaganda effects of the NCNC campaign". By 1947, the delegation finally went to London. It was led by Nnamdi Azikiwe. Other prominent persons in the delegation were Kola Balogun and some central ministers, which included Alfred C. Nwapa, Okoi Arikpo, and Eni Njoku F. M.L. Endeke of the Cameroon province of Eastern Nigeria including Mrs. Olufumilayo Ransomekuti.

The aim of the delegation was to submit the country's objection to the Richards constitution with particular reference to the four obnoxious ordinance namely, Public Collection Ordinances, Mineral ordinance, deposition of chiefs ordinance and the land acquisition ordinance. There was a petition to the Secretary of State with a proposal for a fifteen year plan towards Dominion status. Consequently, the delegation had a bad reception in England. They were smeared by a section of British press. The colonial office told them "they represented nobody". The British seemed to think that Nigeria nationalism was a minority phenomenon. Some who thought so tended to interpret the action and words of the Nationalist delegation simply as personal ambition and individual prejudice against colonialism or mere quirks of characters. They accordingly told them to go home and co-operate with the colonial government.



Members of the NCNC London Delegation 1947 and National Executive on their Return

Picture Sitting Left to Right: - Mr. A. K. Blankson, Mallam Zana Bukar Dipcharima, Mr. Magnus O. A. Williams (*acting National President*), Mrs. F. Ransome-Kuti, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Ibiyinka Olorun Nimbe and Mr. Paul M. Kale, **Standing Left to Right:** - Mr. A. Omage, Late S. A. George, Mr. M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu, O. N. Ojogun, Mr. O. Ogunye and Fred. U. Anyiam (Author).

Although Azikiwe led delegation was received by a mammoth crowd on arrival in Nigeria its inability to get some concession from the British Government led to some acrimony that tore up their proposal for constitutional reform. It also called for more radical freedom charter, which demanded self-government this time outside the British Commonwealth. This almost crippled the NCNC as a political party as the ideological crisis that reeled on led to the dissolution of the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953.

Although NCNC was initially a nation-wide party since its membership comprised of men and women from the four corners of Nigeria, yet not all the intellectuals were attracted to it. The reason could be described as Anti-zikism. The origin of this could be traced to the dispute between Sir Adeyemo Alakija and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Both of them were fund of publishing articles likely to incite further feelings of ill-will between the Yoruba and the Igbo. Perhaps for this and other reason, a cultural organization sprang up among the Yoruba. It was known as the Egbe Omo Oduduwa literally the society of the descendant of Oduduwa. It was the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba. It later metamorphosed to be a political party, the Action Group (A.G.). It was founded in 1949 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The members of the part were the opponents of the NCNC both at the Eastern Region and the Western Region. The party dominated the political scene in the Western Region in a similar way that the NCNC did in the East. It advocated for freedom for all. It also advocated for a federal system.

Meanwhile, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was founded in 1951 by a group of Northerners with Umaru Dikko as Chairman and Malam Sa Zungur as Secretary. These were ultra conservative traditional leaders of the North within the Northern provinces. Finally, the executive of the movement had their personal grievances with the colonial administration.

V. THE ROLE OF THE ZIKIST MOVEMENT

For sometimes, the utterances of these extremists in the movement and those of like mind had been confined to the usual talk of imperialist exploitation and oppression coupled with vague threats of positive action. The first indication that they were about to go a bit further was when the delegation sent to London in 1947 to demand for self-government from the colonial office returned without any success. The Zikist movement spear-headed the campaign to cripple the colonial government. Slogans such as “Down with Imperialism”, “Away with Richards Constitution”, “Nigeria first Britain last all the time” were popularized by the movement. Car stickers with bold inscriptions “self-government for Nigeria now” were also pasted on most vehicles.

Through lectures, symposia and rallies, the Zikist movement carried out massive programme of political education of the masses and some became a household name in the country. Their programmes soon attracted thousands of teachers, clerks, traders, workers, journalists, ex-servicemen and students. Boys left schools and young men resigned their jobs to join the Zikist movement and worked as campaigners and propagandists against the colonial administration.

The Zikist movement also initiated a freedom charter at the NCNC convention of 1948, in Kaduna. By this charter, the party was supposed to declare Nigeria a Republic, with all its implications. Plans for realizing the aim of the charter were worked out and a public lecture to popularize it entitled "A call for a Revolution to be delivered by Osita Agwuna was fixed at Tom Jones Hall Lagos for October 27, 1948. Due to the kind of publicity given to the lecture, several hours before the kick off time, the hall was already filled to capacity and people over-flowed into the adjoining Ereko (now Nnamdi Azikiwe) and Docemo streets. The lecture was chaired by Anthony Enahoro, and supported by H.R. Abdulla, Anthony Enahor, and supported by H.R. Abdullah, Ralph Aniedobe, Ogoegbunam Dafe and others.

In the eloquently delivered lecture by Osita Agwuna said "Nigeria had two enemies". The first was the colonial government and the second was the fear of the people to rise and drive the government out. So far as he could see, the only hope of salvation was progressive revolution, beginning with a civil disobedience and campaign, though that would clearly not be enough. For a start, however, everyone should refuse to pay tax to a foreign government but should pay an equivalent amount into the NCNC funds. They should no longer recognize the king of England as the ruler of Nigeria. Empire Day should no longer be celebrated in schools. Nobody should join the civil service or the army. Nigeria Policemen should not obey Orders particularly when such orders involved shooting or throwing tear gas at their fellow Nigerians. Soldier should turn their guns on any British officer who ordered them to shoot their demonstrating brothers. He also stressed that the NCNC on its forthcoming tour should preach a doctrine of hate and contempt for the present regime and present the NCNC to the people as their sole National Government with full responsibilities. He accused the government of tanning ethnic discord by encouraging minority elements in the country. He also called those present at the lecture to pledge themselves to take any measure to silence the minorities and to overthrow the colonial government in order to handover to the NCNC. So potent was their plan of action that some colonial Lords were reportedly sending their families back home out of fear.

The Zikist movement in the Eastern provinces continued to focus its attacks on imperialist exploitation of the country, the denial of human rights, the bogus constitutions, the obnoxious ordinance (laws) and the collusion of reactionary feudal chieftain with imperialism. This class was to the Zikist Conformists who would like to enjoy the privilege that contributed to the maintenance of the machine of colonial administration.

The British Governor of Nigeria at this time was Sir John Macpherson. He took over from Arthur Richards who retired in 1948. The former was haunted and obsessed by the Zikists. If his typist made typographical mistake, it was the Zikists. If the tyre of his car by chance got punctured, he blamed it on the Zikists. If a chief failed to collect enough taxes, he had been won over by the Zikists. This official mania, rather than deter the Zikists. This official mania, rather than deter the Zikist emboldened them and boosted the morale of the youths.⁴⁷

VI. THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF THE ZIKISTS

As the colonial government had already warned, the Police swerved into action and arrested Osita Agwunad and Anthony Enahoro who was the chairman of the meeting. They also arrested Duke Dafe and Ralph Anieboke two comparatively obscure members of the Zikist movement. They had taken it upon themselves to support Agwuna on the platform and to distribute cyclostyled copies of the speech to the audience. Other young Zikists and officers of the NCNC were arrested and their houses ransacked. The Police took a copy of the 'Call for Revolution'.

The arrest did not occasion any undue excitement. There was little sympathy for Osita Agwuna for it was assumed by most people that he had made the speech in furtherance of his declared objective of getting himself into prison. It was not understood why the other three should be arrested. There was a considerable sympathy for Anthony Enahoro who had only been released from detention a month before and it was thought that government was victimizing him. The Daily Service, a colonial newspaper came out with attacks on Nnamdi Azikiwe saying that he had put those misguided young men up to making the speech. The paper also stated that if he were patriot he held himself out to be, he would have insisted on going to prison with them and sharing all their tribulations. (Okoroafor, 1997:2-3).



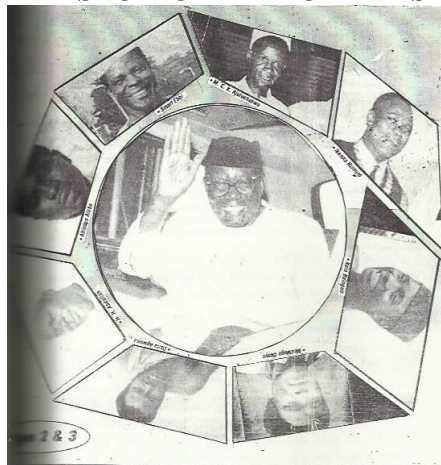
Sir Macpherson, Governor General of Nigeria 1951-53

The NCNC declared a state of emergency and cancelled their tour in view of the crisis that was facing the nation. Even within the ranks and file of the party, there was no unity. The Zikist movement was, as might be expected, the most active and wasted no time in trying to whip up excitement both in Lagos and in the provinces. Among other things they circulated the following inspiring message to all branches:

“Nationalist Message Lagos”,

Be it known by Zikists and freedom-loving Nigerians, that this is the hour. The Zikist movement can no longer hope to have reason where, it is evident respect for reason does not exist. The movement is therefore calling upon the youths of the country to support it in the present struggle for freedom. We cannot allow the challenge on our manhood to go. (Headline 1988)

VII. HISTORIC TRIAL OF ZIKISTS



Picture of the Zikist movement

In the case of Osita Agwuna when the trial judge dismissed the submission of defence counsel Mr. J.I.C. Taylor, that publication was not part and parcel of distribution of a matter. Osita Agwuna, from the dock sought to address the court and he was allowed. He told the court;

I do not consider this court properly constituted to try me. I do not expect justice from a court, which is decidedly serving the purpose of the very government against which I am preaching disaffection. You may go ahead with our trial but be sure that one day the people of Nigeria will come on their own, and the role of minions like you will be exposed to history, and your children will feel ashamed of having a father like you. (The Times, 1989:15)

The British Counsel, undisturbed, fought very hard to establish the guilt of young Zikists facing trial. And as was expected, the judge found all of them guilty as charged. But before passing his judgment, he called on them to make their statement one by one. In conformity with the earlier agreement of the young Zikists not to plead for leniency no matter the threat, the young Zikists on trial had this to tell the judge, starting from Osita Agwuna;

What then was the stance of Nnamdi Azikiwe on the Zikist issues? Given his belief in the doctrine of liberal democracy: it was therefore surprising that he would part company with the Zikist movement in the light of differences on strategy. Azikiwe had cause to caution the militant Nationalist on the following words:

But we must warn the youngsters as ever we have done, that hard work and diligent studies will fetch far riches and dividends than high sounding slogans and plans that fizzle out into a nine day's woner 26 African Revolution. (Ezera, 1964:88)

Accordingly, Azikiwe ordered his editor never to allow anything about the Zikist movement to appear in. The spokesman or any of his publications. Thus Azikiwe's belief in the doctrine of "Liberal democracy" according to him was in contradiction to the radical strategy of the Zikist movement. Against this view, he described the members of the movement "as viviparous lieutenants and cantankerous followers". This was even more apparent when the new governor Sir John Macpherson who assumed office in April 1948 promised a number of constitutional reforms in line with the demands of the NCNC. Consequently Kalu Ezera noted that:

"This is indeed an unexpected announcement to the country yet it was received everywhere, especially from Nationalist Camp with great joy and excitement. (Nsuffot and Nkaneme 1966:12)

Besides that Nnamdi Azikiwe was invited to address the congress of people against imperialism held in London. He then proceeded to prepare for a conference on "Human Rights and to visit Moscow. On his arrival in England, he was invited to spend an evening in London and welcomed with kindness and treated as an honoured guest by the English host. It was here that he remarked;

"In all the times I have been in London this is the first time I have been as an equal in somebody's private house. (Nsuffot and Nkaneme 1966:12)

VIII. THE BAN ON THE ZIKISTS MOVEMENT

The attempt on the life of Hugh Foot, the Chief Secretary of the government by Helas Ugokwe portrayed the Zikist movement as a violent and dangerous movement. Although Helas Ugokwe admitted during his trial before Justice S. B. Rhode that he behaved the way he did because he did not like the view that peace would give Nigeria the independence it wanted, by that statement the judge knew that he was not teleguided but he acted alone and not carrying out their policy. Consequently, the Zikist movement was proscribed or banned and the leadership charged to court and convicted.

IX. THE IVA VALLEY TRAGEDY AND ITS AFTERMATHS 1949 – 50

Of the politically inspired breaches of the peace the most serious and widespread came as an aftermath of the Iva valley tragedy of 1949. Enugu shooting of 1949 was not a spontaneous isolated incident, rather, the disturbances got to Aba, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Owerri and Calabar. This was because it was related to the staging of a political demonstration to further Purely Political ends to affect the process of decolonization.

The colliery department was about the largest employer of labour, skilled and unskilled in Eastern Nigeria. for instance, the labour force was increased from 2,793 in 1938 – 39, when the output was 32,2.263 tons. Thus the labour force of 6003 made up as follows, 1355 hewers, 3,442 underground workers other than hewers and 1,206 surface workers. These employees were mainly paid daily. The situation if based on the present day perspective was fraught with uncertainty and economic insecurity for the labourers. Before 1945, they had begun to demand without success improvements in their working conditions and wages including health amenities and free housing.

In July 1949, there was a strike action inspite of efforts at conciliation by Tokumboh. In November 1949, there was yet another go-slow strike, the reason was the non-upgrading of hewers pay. The colonial government reacted to the hewers demand by issuing a press release from the Regional Public Relations Officers. The management said that the colliery had reached their economic limite and that the management had already stated, it was quite unable to meet the men's demands for either increase of salary or in respect of certain sum of money they alleged due to them. (Aniefowose, 1982:42)

On 8th November 1949 at the Iva Valley, a good number of workers estimated at 1,500 had come to work but were moving about. Fearing that they might enter the magazine to use explosives in a manner dangerous to the public, the colonial government decided to remove the explosives. Even then, it turned out on that fateful day that not explosives but twenty-one unarmed hungry and harmless workers were shot. This was due to the command of F.S. Phillip, Senior Superintendent of Police with 75 men under his command.

This incident in the process of decolonization was contrary to Remi-Anifowase's thesis; that Nigeria struggle for independence was that of relative gentleness and that the colonial policy was consistently moving towards self-rule. (1949 commission of enquiry)

X. CLASHES BETWEEN CLANS AND COMMUNITIES BASED ON ETHNIC ANIMONISITIES

During the period under review in this chapter there had been a number of disturbances in the Region. The most serious being the Okrika-Kalabari disputes. It has its roots in the distant past but was kept alive by the economic implications of 1949. In August 1950, the cruelty and misery this dispute brought in its train came to its climax when some Okrika fishermen were attacked at a distance from their town and it was feared that some 116 persons lost their lives.⁷⁶

Consequently six new diesel-engine launch were brought into service in the Region during the year. Three of these however together with one steam launch were being used by the police in connection with the Okrika-Kalabari investigation.

Although the bodies of less than a third of this number were recovered extra police were immediately drafted to the area of crime for intensive and rigorous investigations. Despite the forces of law and order in the region to the scale of a seemingly police state, the colonial government still had difficulties in bringing the culprits to justice and to counter the effect of machination of ethnic cruelty.

However, the findings of the enquiry, held under the collective punishment ordinance into Massacre of over 100 Okrika were published. The enquiry's recommendation that the Kalabari be fined £20,000 was accepted by the Governor who directed that £12,000 be paid as compensation to the Okrika and that the balance should go towards defraying the cost of the police action that had to be taken to restore order. The Okrika were pleased with the award and were particularly delighted that the officers appointed to conduct the enquiring categorically affirmed their belief that the kalabari were aggressors. (Nigeria Political summary)

XI. THE TIV-OBUDU DISTURBANCES

In yet another development during our period, was the Tiv-Obudu disturbance of the Benue and Ogojija provinces respectively in January 1950. it was purely local in character until May of the same year when a more serious encounter took place. On the later occasion only prompt administrative and police action prevented the disturbance assuming the proportions of full scale tribal war. Of the twenty-one deaths, which resulted only five were actually inflicted during the fighting. The remaining casualties were in the nature of murders behind the lines. One hundred and four (104) Obudu person were convicted on various charges in connection with the disturbances ranging from death in twelve (12) instances to small fines.

Also in the same Ogoja province, there had been the usual crop of minor disturbances resulting from land disputes the most serious being between Mgob of Abakaliki and the Igala-Idoma (the Oturkpo people), the Ikom of Afikpo district and Okon of Bendel Division and between the villages of Ofunbamga and Nkum Akpombo in Obubra Division.

In Onitsha province, the long standing Onitsha – Obosi land dispute was kept alive in March 1950. tear gas had to be used by the police to disperse a mob for women demonstrating in connection with the land dispute. There were also breaches of the peace over other land cases in Awka Division, but were promptly brought under control by the timely intervention of the Native Authorities. By September of 1950, there were disturbances in Awgu, which resulted in thirty nine (39) person being convicted by the magistrate. (Gibbon's intelligence report 1943)

In Calabar Division inter-tribal jealousies also resulted in a number of disturbances but the vigour and vigilance of the Native Authorities prevailed. Even in the Bamenda province of the Cameroon province of Eastern Nigeria a quarrel between the Fon of Nsaw and the Fai Ndzendzet caused some unrest which also attracted the attention of the colonial administration in Eastern Nigeria.

XII. DISTURBANCES AS A RESULT OF NATIVE AUTHORITY ORDINANCES OF 1943

In 1943, the Native Authority Ordinance was introduced. It empowered the Governor to recognize chiefs and government officials of Eastern Provinces. It also brought the various ethnic groups in the Eastern provinces under a single modern administration within a particular sole Authority. Indeed a draft specimen of rules under section 25 (1) xxxii) of the Native Authority Ordinance conferring upon Native Authorities Power to control the

alienation of land to strangers were also prepared by a commission appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern provinces. There was also a Bill excluding Corporate bodies established under an Ordinance from the provisions of the Native lands. The acquisition Ordinance was endorsed by the Eastern Nigeria legislative council and was subsequently passed into law of Eastern Nigeria. By this law, many corporate bodies were granted powers to much of the crown lands to planning authorities, some vested interest arose and some contradictions were inherent in the system of land alienation.

Consequently, the new system far from bringing about any peaceful and stable administration, succeeded in grouping ethnic fragments which had significant cultural differences and tradition under one local authority. It was against this background that ethnic units in different local authorities continued to ferment inter-ethnic wars because of boundary disputes. There was the SII, Ogoni/Andoni, Ogoni/Bolo, Okrika, Baalueku, Ogoni/Obete, Okwale-Ogoni/Umuagbai disturbances. They were all characterized by palpable homicide and kidnappings. Thus the constant features of the period were that of economic conflict and political upheaval. The situation in Ogoni and her neighbours during the nineteen forties was not quite different from the events of pre-colonial period in the communities mentioned above. It corresponded with the trend in some Delta communities which according to E.J. Alagoa.

The main activities of some Delta communities provoke war, piracy, head hunting and slave raids.

Thus, the Ogoni admitted to head hunting in defence of their territory, which they felt, alienated as a result of the reforms of the Native Authority in 1943.

At this time the Kuegia confraternity⁸⁴ organised and fought incessant guerilla wars. The group was fond of slaying an enemy and presenting the skulls or dedicating them as votaries to village deities. The word Kuegia means "Brave Lions". They glorified individual bravery and encouraged many skirmishes on the border villages of Ndoki, Andoni and Okrika. This was not peculiar to the Ogoni, other communities as already stated above had similar problems. According to Jeffery M. D. 1947 each of these communities that had been autonomous began to ferment inter-tribal boundary disputes. (Gbeneye, 1988:75)

XIII. EX-SERVICEMEN

A serious threat to security also came from the ex-servicemen in Owerri province. Though agitation on the day of mourning of the victims of Enugu Coal Mine shooting in November 1949 was successfully averted, the men continued to drill privately, inspected by self-appointed "Generals", "Brigadiers" and lesser staff, officers, and they were not discouraged by searches for concealed arms by men of the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.). They were further heartened by the interest taken in them by ex-lieutenant Igboma whose brief and inglorious career as the first African Commissioned Officer in the Royal West African force terminated just in time to save him from series of court martial charges. He promoted himself to the rank of a General. He went to incite other agitators such as Wachukwu and Ezesi. Indeed the unemployed ex-servicemen became convinced that they were a class apart to whom the normal provisions of law did not apply. An Assistant Superintendent of police, who attempted to search one of them for arms, was assaulted and slightly wounded. The ex-servicemen invaded the Post Offices and drove the operators from their duty. They also placed road-block on the main roads to hinder the movement of police reinforcements. They attacked and robbed a European member of the Railway staff. (Political Summary, 1953)

Finally, despite efforts to rehabilitate the ex-servicemen, they were making some demands. The strategy they adopted was to refuse to pay tax without pondering on the constitutional facts that existed. The colonial administration saw this as an unreasonable demand in the sense that there were guidelines for the exemption from payment of tax. This exemption was only extended to indigent persons and this of course included any ex-serviceman who was in such a disabled condition.

XIV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We agree with Claude Ake that "the post war boom merely raised aspirations which could not be fulfilled" it dramatized the inequalities and the exploitative character of the colonial situation. Discontent with colonialism grew faster than economic expansion.

Despite all efforts by the metropolitan power to initiate some reforms, the Nationalist Politicians and Local Actors of Eastern Region reacted violently to colonial government. This period happened at the time when the political parties were formed. This contradiction was sharpened by the fact that colonial capitalism was very monopolistic thereby marginalizing the emerging Nigerian Petty Bourgeoisie. The emerging class was frustrated by its exclusion from benefits of the boom period and the participation in the colonial political economy.

In the words of James Coleman **Modern Nationalism** "Included sentiment, activities and organizational development aimed explicitly at self-government and independence". This confirms J.O. Connel's thesis that

the repeated political disruptions were a reminder of the late introduction of “democratic values in colonial governance with successor nationalists being starved of such virtues as tolerance and modernization”.

The experience of the fifties anticipated the dilemma of the first Republic. The people of Eastern Nigeria naturally expected a great deal of their freedom. No government could have satisfied the expectation that freedom aroused, in particular the hunger for universal free education and for tax exemption by the ex-servicemen.

Indeed every village group anxiously awaited a good access road, an improved water supply, electrification, schools and a hospital. No government could have commanded the resources to satisfy them. Indeed the colonial economy was stretched thin.

For one thing, Bureaucratic procedure is necessarily meant to be slow and thorough. The highest bureaucratic machine, the civil service was slow and methodical in course of implementing government policies.

Apart from that, political democracy provided for a thorough debate of all policy measures, laws and regulations in the legislative before final adoption. This process was made slower still by the provision that bills be read and debated three times before it was finally passed into law.

Finally the transfer of power was formerly a vague aspiration for an indefinite future until U.S. Multi – National Corporations, threatened Britain’s imperial role.

Nevertheless, on significance of the Disturbances in the Eastern Region was that they took place at a time when the Macpherson constitution was being debated. It therefore afforded a unique opportunity for dialogue in 1951 – 59 as could be seen in chapter five.

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