

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Africa in London.

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93 Cornwall Gardens
London, S.W.7., England

Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York 17, New York.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

My immersion into Africa in London began in a burst of black chauffeur driven Rolls-Royces, the happy sounds of the High Life and a taste of the internal politics of the Federation of Nigeria. All this took place at the residence of Chief Akintoye Coker, Agent-General for Western Nigeria in the United Kingdom. Chief Coker's home, an aging but stately London mansion, sits across the road from Kensington Palace, the home of Princess Margaret and the Earl of Snowdon. The sleek and shiny Rolls-Royces pulled up in front of the portico of the Agent-General's home and discharged African passengers in flowing robes of many shades and many colours. English chauffeurs clad in dark blue uniforms parked the cars in the courtyard to await the return of their passengers. They stood by the cars and held conversations on the current state of English cricket, the pay pause and other peculiarly English things.

In the house, the invitation was handed to a young African civil servant dressed in what would seem to be a kind of uniform for African civil servants in London, a dark blue three piece suit. Walking down a long softly carpeted hallway to the Ballroom, we stepped through the door into a galaxy of colourful, magnificent, swinging robes punctuated by the grey and blue of business suits. The laughter was high and free, the atmosphere relaxed and heady. In the middle of the room surrounded by Ministers, students and clerks, stood the guest of honour, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Leader of the Action Group Opposition in the Federal Parliament of Nigeria. "Awo", as he is called, holds both a Bachelor or Commerce Degree and a Law Degree from colleges in Britain. In 1951 under Awo's leadership, the Action Group came into being and called for a programme based on "Freedom for all, Life more abundant". It demanded freedom from British rule, from ignorance, from disease and from war. This powerful but minority political party is based in the Yoruba-dominated Western Region of Nigeria. It holds the government of the Western Region and pushes vigorously for Federal power. Before becoming Leader of the Opposition in the Federal House of Representatives, Chief Awolowo had served as Premier of the Western Region.

Awo's agbada was sky-blue and flowed to the floor, and as he turned from left to right, it was as though he concealed beneath his clothing some hidden pivot. The warmth of his smile, the ease of his conversation were as flowing as the clothes he wore, yet it seemed obvious that this was an astute politician who had come through the blood of many political wars and had the wherewithal to do many a political battle still.

My companion, Abraham Ngidi, a young refugee journalist from South Africa, was of particular interest to Chief Awolowo. He questioned him about conditions in South Africa, and was particularly interested in how he had made his way from South Africa to London. Ngidi spoke fervently of his travels and the many hardships as well as the many friendships he had encountered. He dwelt at some length on Ghana where he had received a particularly warm welcome. At this point in the conversation "Awo" vigorously asserted it was indeed time other African countries, particularly Nigeria, gave more time and attention to the refugees of South Africa and Angola. He attributed lack of concern to the fact that Nigeria had gotten its freedom "handed to it on a platter", and this meant that there was not enough real appreciation of the suffering many of their fellow Africans were going through to attain liberty and independence.

When the Chief finally turned to me, the burden of his inquiry was, how are things going for "our brothers" in the United States, and when are more of the "brothers" coming to Africa to contribute to its struggle for economic and political viability. My response to his first point was detailed, knowledgeable and, I think, accurate. As for his second point, that recurring question of "the return", the Black Exodus, my answer was vague, uncertain and uneasy. Perhaps it was my "guilty" perception of no black ingathering of the exiles that motivated a string of fuzzy platitudes.

During this exchange many of the guests had stood close by to listen, and when Chief Awolowo turned to talk with someone else, Ngidi and I soon found ourselves surrounded by many other Nigerians interested in the problems of race and color in South Africa and in the United States.

So there amid the music, the fun, and the swirling of gowns and the clinking of glasses, we continued our dialogue on the place of the Black Man in the world. However, the beat of the music, the consumption of cocktails soon turned the attention of the whole reception to much lighter things, and the music of the phonograph was turned up and dancing started. The zest for politics was equalled by the zest for the High Life.

As Abraham Ngidi, my Zulu companion, and I left the reception, we were offered a ride by the Honourable J. Ola Odigun, Minister of Lands and Housing, Western Nigeria, or, as he described his task, "Minister of Inanimate Things."



Speaking: Chief Obafemi Awolowo
On his right Chief Akintoye Coker
at the Office of the Agent-General
for Western Nigeria in London.

Mr. Odigun said he was going on to a party, and asked if we cared to join him. We jumped at the chance. He took us by the arms and ushered us to one of the black chauffeur driven Rolls-Royces. As we drove through the London night, we had an animated discussion of politics in Nigeria. The "Minister of Inanimate Things" indicated the people of the Western Region, especially the Yoruba, were somewhat restive under the political domination of the more numerous, tradition ridden Moslem Hausas of the North. He shared this view with many others at the party and the reception. There was evidence of strong feeling that progress in the modernization of Nigeria would proceed at a much faster pace if there was some way, some method, whereby the more numerous Northerners political hegemony in federal politics could be broken.

We arrived at the party to find that many of the persons at the reception had preceded us, including a number of the other Ministers from the Western Region. Here, however, there was a larger proportion of younger people and students, and there was almost no political conversation. It was the High Life and American jazz all the way.

The party, which was given in honour of a Nigerian student leaving for the Harvard Medical School, ended at around six o'clock in the morning. The Yoruba "Minister of Inanimate Things" gathered the South African Zulu and the Negro from America into his black limousine, driven by his English chauffeur, and they all headed happily home for bed.

This part of Africa in London was almost wholly African. There were very few Europeans either at the reception or the farewell party. Basically, these were internal affairs.

Later in the month, however, I saw Africa in London within the framework of the Commonwealth Seventh Parliamentary Conference. It was a time of pomp, circumstance and ceremony, and everyone who was a part of it seemed to love it, from the Marquis of Cholmondely, the Lord Great Chamberlain, to His Highness, Oba Samuel Akinsanya, the Odemo of Ishara. There was handsome Ishmael Bun Jobe of Gambia wearing the velvet cap of a chieftain and robes of grey, black and white, and the Honourable Kofi Baako, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs from Ghana in a lounge suit of grey. There was Alhaji Isa Kiata, Minister of Education for Nigeria, draped in a voluminous robe of deep maroon with cream stripes, topped by a flowing headgear that possessed the colours of the rainbow; and peeking from under his robe were white shoes, very much reminiscent of the white bucks of American college boys. There was Paramount Chief The Honourable Raymond B.S. Koker, O.B.E., Minister without Portfolio for Sierra Leone. And there were others from Uganda, from Tanganyika, from Kenya, from Gambia, from Nyasaland.

There in great Westminster Hall, Africa mingled with the Dukes and Viscounts of the United Kingdom, the Sikhs and Hindus of India, the Senators from Canada; and with them, bowed in homage to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth.

The prominence of Africa at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was best exhibited in the presence of the Honourable Raymond Amanze Njoku, Federal Minister of Transport and Aviation for Nigeria, and Vice-Chairman of the General Council of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Awaiting the arrival of the Queen, he stood on stage between the Earl of Munster, Deputy Chairman of the United Kingdom Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and Sir Roland Robinson, Chairman of the General Council of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The two men of the United Kingdom were dressed in the somber black and grey of formal morning clothes. Njoku stood between them, dressed in startling simplicity in cream colored robes. It was striking, symptomatic and symbolic.

Following the welcoming speeches of the Queen and the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, Mr. Njoku, a product of the Universities of London and Cambridge, arose to respond for the Association. It was not just a speech, but a performance of grace and dignity. With no trace of sycophancy he praised and thanked the Queen and with deep sincerity gloried in the parliamentary heritage of Great Britain. The applause indicated a Nigerian conquest of vaulted Westminster Hall. Among the British in the Hall there seemed to be the quiet satisfaction of "See, we didn't do so badly after all as colonial masters." If this is truly what was there, it is a justifiable sentiment fraught with some danger for the Federation of Nigeria. Such approbation from the former colonial master is not a great asset on the African continent.

The trumpets blew, the Queen and her Duke departed, and vibrant conversation ended this symbolic and real juxtaposition of Empire and Commonwealth. I left the Great Hall with Chief Akintoye Coker and his lady. We stood in line and waited until his Rolls-Royce arrived at the carpeted exit.

So far, I have been talking about the Africa of the Establishment here in London, but there is another part of Africa in London, the struggle for uhuru. In one of the better areas in London, Golders Green, sits a large house owned by the Southern Rhodesia National Democratic Party. It is a house of much coming and going.

One night there was a party for a nurse going to take post-graduate training at a hospital in Trenton, New Jersey. Another night there was a reception for the Vice-President of the N.D.P. At another time there was a meeting of Southern Rhodesian Students studying in and around London. Leopold Takawira, Director of Internal and International Affairs for the National Democratic Party lives in

the house with his family. Numerous guests, especially Southern Rhodesian students, are encouraged to come and make the house in Golders Green their "home away from home". Takawira explained that this is something which is not only helpful to students living in a strange land, but also provides the N.D.P. with the chance to introduce the aspirations and goals of the Party to students at a very important time in their lives, and in the history of their country. There is a great deal of laughter and warmth at this house in Golders Green.

Its grimmer and more basic purposes were demonstrated on a Sunday afternoon I spent there. Joshua Nkomo, President-General of the N.D.P., had come to London in time for the opening of the British Parliament, for there was to be a full scale debate on British African policy. One of the items included in the debate was the constitution for Southern Rhodesia. I sat in the office with Nkomo and Takawira as they held a series of conferences with a stream of visitors about various strategies, plans and actions. It was a day of intensity, dedication and hope.

There is another house in London where the African fight for uhuru goes on. Looking at it from the outside one would not associate this kind of edifice with revolutionary activity. It is Africa Unity House. It is a fully refurbished, red bricked London mansion located in another of London's desirable areas, and completely dedicated to the ideal of Pan-Africanism. It is the headquarters for the Committee of African Organisations.

The building was bought by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and presented to the Committee when its old crowded and cramped headquarters burned down. Africa Unity House is a place of elegance. There are red plush carpets on the floor, dazzling quilted wallpaper, furniture in the best of taste, and all the modern conveniences of kitchen and communication. My first visit to Africa Unity House was in the company of Chango Machyo, chairman of the Committee of African Organisations, a student in Economics at the London School of Economics and president of the Uganda Students Association. We had met at a reception given during the Uganda constitutional talks in London. Subsequently, he had stopped off a number of times to visit and the two of us had talked many times about Africa. One day, after some obvious momentary hesitation, he invited me to come to lunch at Africa Unity House. It turned out the luncheon I had been invited to was a luncheon meeting of the Committee of African Organisations. The guest of honour was Kwesi Armah, High Commissioner for Ghana in Britain, and formerly the chairman of the Committee of African Organisations. The luncheon meeting inaugurated the opening of a restaurant in Africa Unity House. I saw many familiar faces, people who had come from Nigeria, people who were studying in Cambridge and Oxford, Africans from Kenya and Swaziland, and Africans from South Africa, political leaders and diplomats, nurses and doctors.

While eating the food of West Africa I spoke with Mr. Armah, who is planning a trip to the United States, but at that exact moment was deeply involved in the question of whether the Queen should make her scheduled visit to Ghana. My longest conversation was with J. J. Nqutu, leader of the Swaziland Progressive Party, who had just completed a six months' tour of America. He laughed as he remembered tasting Budwieser beer for the first time, smiled as he talked about his hospitable reception, frowned as he spoke of his reaction to American racial problems. He was generally pleased with his visit to America, in spite of his unhappiness about the problems of race there. There was however also something else which had disturbed him quite deeply, the kind of reception he had occasionally received from Negro Americans. As an example of his concern, he told me of his visit to the President of one of the major Negro Universities in the South. He had come into the President's home for dinner that evening. After they had been talking for a while, the President left and brought back his two young grandsons, pointed at Nqutu and said, "See, there is an African." Nqutu was disconcerted by this. It made him feel as if he was something in a cage. It was his feeling this kind of ignorance and insensitivity was consistent with many of the attitudes that American Negroes seem to have towards Africans. Again and again he found himself the subject of this kind of display, but not always quite so crudely.

Africa Unity House then is very much the center of African comings and goings in London. It has a hard core of dedicated Nkrumah supporters and many of the members look on Nkrumah as the savior of Africa. Jomo Kenyatta is the other name that hangs on the walls. Like the house in Golders Green, there is laughter here, but more than anything else there is a sense of impatience and of anger.

There is much more, like the Uganda Constitutional Conference and Princess Elizabeth of Toro. There were the African nights at my house, nights on which I would invite a number of people from one of the areas of Africa for dinner and conversation. There is the African Society of the London School of Economics where I found myself trying desperately to explain why 16 million American Negroes would not be "returning" to Africa. There is indeed more, more, more Africa in London. London is surely the playing ground, the training ground, the battleground of the African revolution.

Most sincerely,



Charles J. Patterson

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