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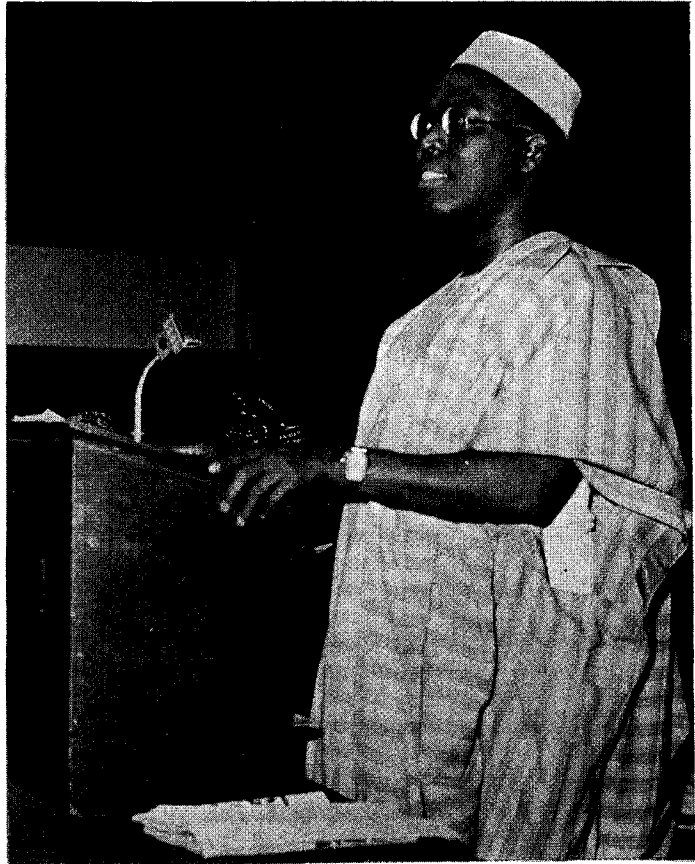
CJP-5
Issues in Lagos

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University College of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

From London I observed that Chief Obafemi Awolwo, leader of the opposition in the Federal Parliament of Nigeria and Federal President of the Action Group, "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." This was an observation based on a series of conversations with some of his most fervent supporters and some of his more violent detractors. On the day I arrived in Lagos, the capital of the Federation, "Awo" was indeed locked in political combat, or, as one of the Lagos dailies put it, Awo was "on the mat." In Parliament, the government was presenting a motion censuring the Chief for what it considered to be derogatory and false charges made during his visit to London.



CHIEF AWOLOWO IN LONDON

The text of the motion read: "That this House views with grave concern the text of a lecture delivered in London on September 3, by the Opposition Leader, which lecture, in the opinion of this House, constitutes an incitement to his Nigerian audience in London and being based on statements without foundation in fact, unbecoming to an honorable member of this House when on a visit outside the Federation."

My interest in this particular battle of Awo's was heightened because I had been present when the controversial remarks were made to a group of Nigerian students. What he had said was that Nigeria was not, in fact, sovereign. The Prime Minister,

Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, according to Awo, takes dictation from Whitehall and the British Prime Minister on certain issues vital to Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large. This dictation, said the Action Group Leader, is further implemented by British diplomatic representatives in Nigeria.

In a speech to the National Press Club in Lagos, Sir Abubakar had earlier replied to Chief Awolowo's allegations. He said it was "painful" to note that Chief Awolowo told such "deliberate untruths" about him, and especially after he had taken the Leader of the Opposition into his confidence about several of his visits abroad.

The Prime Minister had also said he was "appreciative of the genuine fears" held by some members of the public over the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Agreement. Such fears, he contended, arose from the false stories woven around the pact by "some politicians." He emphatically denied that representatives of the Nigerian Government were forced to sign the Agreement.

The concern about the relationship between Nigeria and Britain is shared by others who do not have Awo's political axe to grind. One of these less involved voices is that of the liberal Manchester Guardian. In an editorial that appeared following Awo's London lecture, The Guardian commented: "It is not Britain's fault if the Nigerian Government chooses to be friendly and (by our lights) reasonable, but as a columnist put it recently: 'We are fed up with being called Britain's nice child. It makes us feel such a sissy.' The point is well taken. It is a feeling which used to be strongly felt in Britain about relations with the United States....Perhaps the relationship would be healthier if it did not seem so close. Perhaps Nigerians would prefer devils they don't know to devils they do."

The sweet reason of The Guardian was not reflected in the avid government-supporting newspapers of Lagos. In one paper, Awo was attacked for saying "nasty and slanderous things about the Government and people of this country in a foreign land." That Awolowo had spoken in "a foreign land," especially England, appeared to be the real source of rancor. The paper bluntly spelled this out. "If Chief Awolowo had mounted a soap box in any Nigerian town or village and elected to talk slander against the government, one might regard it as part of the strategy in the fight for political power. But for him to go to London to say things he knows to be untrue about his country is the very nadir of irresponsibility." (Actually, Awo had already made these charges in Nigerian towns and villages.)

In the House of Parliament, Awolowo led his own defense when the motion of censure came up. He and his followers were sharp, passionate, clever, and outnumbered. The motion was passed, and Awo was down "on the mat." The way of his fall, however, has increased the visibility of a still strong, dominant, and disturbing undercurrent in Nigerian political and economic life - "la presence Anglais."

For some Nigerians, Awo's censure has only revived a lingering and uneasy question. When, in fact, will Nigeria be free from the "devils" they know?

During my December stay in Lagos, the Senate of the Federation provided a Nigerian arena for another political and social conflict, one highly indigenous to Western societies, the relationship between church and state. It was also one of a series of continuing clashes between the more populous, backward, Moslem north, and the more advanced and outnumbered political states of the south, the East and the West. Legislation was offered in the Federal Senate which would have amended the Constitution of the Northern Region by providing for the inclusion of the Grand Khadi among the judges of the Northern Region's High Court during the trial of particular cases in which Moslem law was involved. The amendment was defeated by a temporary coalition of the regular Action Group Opposition (based in the Western Region) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (based in the Eastern Region.) This was a unique and tension filled transient alliance, for the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, under the leadership of Nigerian Governor-General Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, holds the Federal Government in coalition with the conservative Moslem-dominated Northern People's Congress of Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The leaders of the NPC were bitter about the "desertion" of their governing partners on an issue so dear to the Moslems' hearts.

Their arguments for the inclusion of the Grand Khadi on the High Court were that 90% of the people living in the Northern Region were Moslems whose normal way of life is governed by Moslem law; that Moslem laws are properly codified and have been in use for many centuries; that the Grand Khadi was well versed in Moslem law and should be favorably compared in rank with any Chief Justice anywhere in Nigeria; that the police of the Northern Emirs arrest people for offenses against Moslem law as well as for civil crimes; and finally that the Grand Khadi would after all be only one of three judges on the High Court.

Their views were presented with a great deal of passion and their subsequent defeat was quite galling. The Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, called for a jihad, a Moslem holy war. The Sardauna said it was not his intention "to wage the war of the cutlass." His jihad was to be a just struggle for religious tolerance and compatible with the political union of the Nigerian Federation. It was fitting in light of that political union, claimed the Sardauna, that the representatives of the Moslem people should ask on their behalf a system whereby the religious susceptibilities of the community would not be destroyed.

The old jihad of the early 19th century, which had ended when the British intervened and drew definitive boundaries between the Northern and Western Region, was different from the new only in the weapons to be used. The basis is the same. Each should be allowed, according to the dictates of his faith, the right to receive justice from his chosen elders.

The Sardauna and his supporters believe further that it is "dangerous to ignore this request as it is dangerous to cast aside the feelings of the Christian and animist communities in the matter." The Christians, animists and pagans "love the British system, the Moslems, have a right to make a claim to prefer the Moslem Penal Code. It is no argument to say this is not the case in the United Kingdom; the United Kingdom is predominantly Christian; Nigeria is at least 50% Moslem."

The day I left Lagos, it was certain that the jihad of the Sardauna of Sokoto was to continue with unabated zest. Along with three other leaders of his Northern People's Congress, he conferred with the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar, who himself has often been described as the "Sardauna's man."

Later, the NPC issued a statement rededicating itself to the cause of Islam in the North. It declared it "would not turn back from fighting for the progress of the people of the North." It concluded with a remonstrance: "We warn members of the Senate that if they descend to the low level of playing politics in the House of the Parliament they will be doing irreparable harm to the cause of unity in this country."

This new jihad of the Hausa and Fulani tribes of the North may not shed blood, but it might wellshred a bit of the Federation of Nigeria.

During my stay in Lagos, Awolowo and the Action Group Opposition were hammering away at one other major issue in the short life of the Federation of Nigeria - corruption in government.

There is some evidence that there is considerable agreement among foreign observers, Nigerian intellectuals, some Government leaders, as well as the Opposition Action Group, that there is only one threat to foreign investment in Nigeria - corruption. I encountered no denials that there is corruption in high places. Indeed, allegations are made that some Ministers are paid 10% commission on all orders contracted by them on behalf of their Government's. Politicians of high standing have been involved in housing and banking scandals. Rumors of Swiss banking accounts abound.

These are things which might also shred a bit of the Federation by driving away foreign capital. The artful Awo has called upon the Government to join him and his colleagues in an anti-corruption campaign to "clean up" the country. The vehemence of the Sardauna, the hard charges of Awolowo, and the quiet passion of Sir Abubakar indicate troubling times for the democratic Federation of Nigeria. That the central arena of their conflicts remains the Federal Parliament of Nigeria indicates the dynamic growth and viable future for the newly arrived Nigerian state.

Sincerely,



Charles J. Patterson