

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CJP - 8

Anniversaries, Emergencies and Teething Troubles

October 15, 1962

Nigerian Institute of Social
and Economic Research.
Private Mail Bag No. 5
University College,
Ibadan, Nigeria

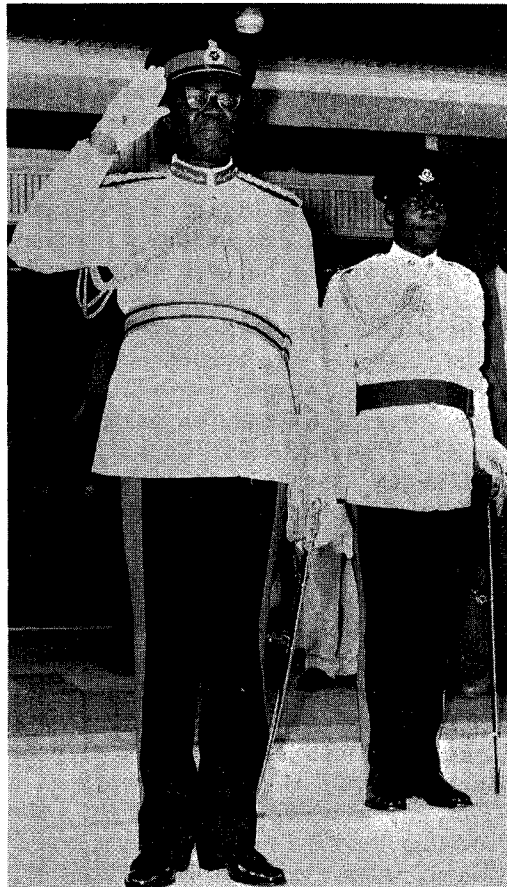
Mr. Richard Nolte.
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue.
New York, 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The second anniversary of Nigerian independence, October 1, 1962 was a day of brilliant sunshine, exuberant crowds, military fanfaronade, religious solemnity, grave stock taking, and sinister currents. Lagos, the capitol of this Federation of 40,000,000 Africans, was the center of all the parading, saluting, shouting, and glorifying that took place in Nigeria that day. The official ceremonies held on the great parade grounds in the middle of the city were graced by cabinet ministers, members of the diplomatic corps, thousands of school children, and what a Lagos newspaper called "leading personalities".

Along the route of march to the parade grounds thousands of lesser folk waved their country's green and white flag as men of the Royal Nigerian Navy, carrying bayonet tipped rifles, stomped by resplendent in new uniforms of white and dark blue. Behind them came units of the Royal Nigerian Army, still dressed in the red fez, red vest, and khaki that were the hallmarks of British African colonial troops. Only the dress uniforms of the officers had been Nigerianized. White jackets and black trousers with a red side stripe had given way to dark green jackets and light grey trousers with a red side stripe. Only the colors had been changed to protect the image of sovereignty.

Dressed in his new ceremonial uniform (grey and green) as Field Marshal. of the Royal Nigerian Army, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Governor-General of the Federation of Nigeria and Commander-in-Chief of the nation's armed forces inspected the troops and took the salute. Next to him on the saluting dais was the Prime Minister of the Federation, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. In contrast



THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

DR. AZIKIWE (OLD UNIFORM)

to the vivid color swirl of diplomatic, military and civilian dress around him, Sir Abubakar, the abstemious Moslem, wore a flowing white agbada.

As massed thousands of Nigerians raised emotional shouts and peals of delighted laughter, a motorcade led by the vehicles of the Prime Minister and the Governor-General closed the official independence day ceremonies. Accompanied by the Band of the Royal Nigerian Army, playing traditional British military music in wondrous fashion, the motorcade wound through the streets, including Nnamdi Azikiwe Road and Tafawa Balewa Square, and deposited the two leaders and members of the official party at their residences. Mrs. Azikiwe had remained at the side of her husband throughout the gala rites. The wives of Alhaji Abubakar, in true Moslem fashion, were not to be seen.

The whole affair came off smoothly, and was solidly in keeping with the highest and most ancient traditions of the British military. There wasn't even a fainting soldier on the parade grounds to be ignored by his rigidly disciplined comrades.

The mood of the crowd was gay, irresistible, and much more indigenously Nigerian as they watched the grimly tramping troops. Long after the British brasses and drum rhythms had faded from the streets, old men beat their talking drums, uniformed (British style) school children laughed and scurried about, market women shouted and sauntered, and young men and women strolled, courted, and basked in the sun. The pell mell, hell for leather traffic of Lagos was more pell mell, hell for leather than ever. The scream of brakes and hooting of horns at first blush appeared to be a nightmare out of Manhattan, but the rollicking good humor of the drivers, including those in taxis, denied it all.

Although the official independence day celebration was highly martial in content and tone, the day before, a Sunday, religion had received its proper due. Dr. Azikiwe, known and beloved throughout Nigeria as Zik (in the Ike sense) had that morning attended a State service in honor of the second independence anniversary at the Olowogbowo Methodist Church in Lagos. Here he read the lesson of the day, Romans, Chapter 12, verses one to eight, and worshipped, prayed and sang with the other "leading personalities". Alhaji Sir Abubakar made his religious obeisance that Sunday evening at the Central Mosque in Lagos, during a special service arranged by the All-Nigeria Moslem Council to mark the second independence anniversary. The Oba of Lagos, the Bologuo of Lagos, Cabinet Ministers and Ambassadors of Moslem persuasion were among those who joined the Prime Minister in giving thanks and praise to Allah.

The eve of the second independence anniversary was also the time for grave evaluation by the Governor-General. In a broadcast to the nation he urged Nigerians to give thanks to God that they have succeeded in administering their affairs without any major breakdown of law and order which would "either endanger our corporate existence or embarrass our relations with other countries". He spoke directly of one of the two most pressing internal issues facing the fledgling Federation, the recent discovery of an illegally imported quantity of arms and ammunition, and indirectly of the other, the continued suspension of the government of the Western Region (state) by Federal authorities. Security officers, Dr. Azikiwe said, were still investigating the arms matter, in process of which a number of persons had been apprehended.

"There is no cause for alarm since the due process of law will run its course if the liberty of the persons concerned should be in jeopardy. The disorder prevailing in internal affairs of our country is evidence of teething troubles expected of any new sovereign and independent nation such as ours.

"But they are also a challenge to test the ability of our Federal Government to restore possible breakdown of law and order expeditiously with the speed, firmness, thoroughness and fair play demanded for the stability of orderly government and the security of a state peopled by law abiding inhabitants".

The Governor-General ended his anniversary broadcast by declaring the belief of Nigerians "in individual freedom--in the freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, and the exercise of the fundamental rights of man--under the rule of law".

In a dawn broadcast on independence day the Prime Minister added explicit details to the "teething troubles" referred to the day before by Dr. Azikiwe. Said Sir Abubakar; "For sometime past, the Government has been aware of the violent intentions of certain persons and of the fact that young men were being sent abroad for militant political training preparatory to an attempt to destroy our constitution completely and overthrow the Government".

He disclosed that on September 15 "a man who was known to have received military training abroad and who brought arms to Lagos was arrested". It was in the course of their investigation that the police "procured evidence of a plot to sieze arms and explosives, abduct members of the Government and stage a coup d' etat".

"This plot has been foiled owing to the vigilance of the Government and the Nigerian Police Force. Investigation is proceeding with a view to bringing those criminals involved to justice".

Three men had been charged with unlawful possession of firearms and explosives and were in custody and twelve others implicated were being detained under the Emergency Regulations. "But the three men principally implicated in the organization of the plot have absconded and are now abroad".



THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL (NEW UNIFORM)

AND HIS WIFE

Here Sir Abubakar had for the first time publicly joined the suspected coup d' etat with the suspension of the Western Region. For though he named no names it was common knowledge that the three fugitives were top leaders in the Action Group, the party that had held the Western Region Government before the state of emergency was declared, and is even now the official Opposition to the Federal Government. One of the three, Chief Anthony Enahoro, is first-vice president of the Action Group

and the party's spokesman on foreign affairs in the Parliament. Another, Samuel Grace Ikoku is the Federal Secretary of the Action Group.

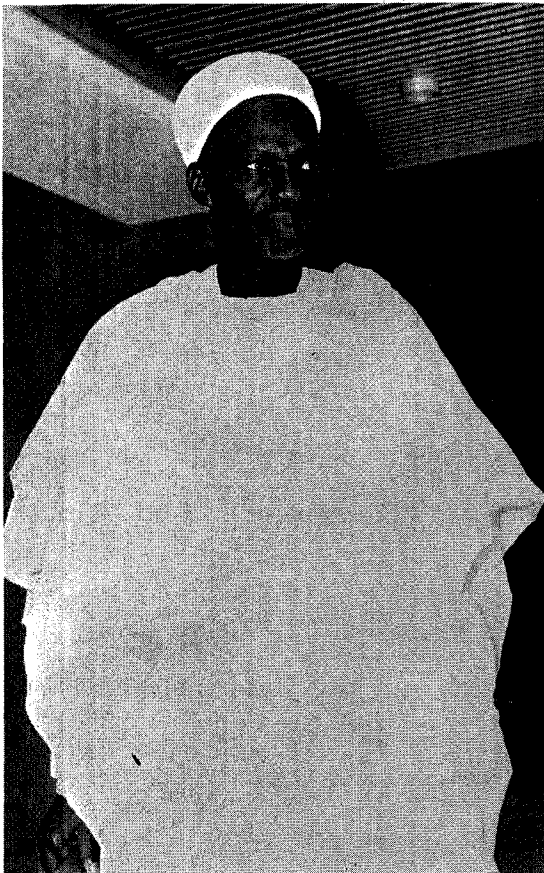
So on the second anniversary of independence some of Nigeria's leading politicians, non-members of the Federal Government coalition of Dr. Azikiwe's Eastern Region-based National Council of Nigerian Citizens and Sir Abubakar's Northern Peoples' Congress, are in jail, fugitives, or under house arrest. The latter is the case of the Leader of the Opposition and former Premier, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Altogether, in one form or another, a total of at least twenty Members of Parliament, attorneys, former Cabinet Ministers, party officials and journalists are being detained. It is fairly certain that this number will soon be augmented by additional arrests.

These are the troubled currents which flowed under the exuberant spectacles of independence day, 1962. They are still here under day by day tranquility and steady economic development. Their long range resolution is likely to involve the redistribution of political power in the nation, for the political balance of the Federation has rested upon a tripartite sharing of power which has made it difficult for any one ethnic political group to dominate the others. The governing coalition of the East (Dr. Azikiwe and his Ibo tribesmen) and the North (Alhaji Abubakar and his Moslem Hausa and Fulani brethren), with the West (Chief Awolowo and his largely Yoruba followers) in opposition, has given the country the solid ins and outs of effective Parliamentary government. In fact the constitution appears to have been deliberately designed with this end in view. Now, however, an essential element of social and political stability, the Action Group Opposition of the West, is under heavy pressure, attack, and attrition.

The Action Group brought much of this on itself, for the state of emergency and suspension of their government in the West came only after serious internecine factional fights characterized by actual physical violence in the Western Region Parliament, charges and counter charges of personal corruption, and the establishment of a splinter party. For several months now the Federal investigation of the affairs of the Western Region has dragged on. Financial scandals have been uncovered and venality in public office has been exposed. Yet, so far, the commission of inquiry has not been able to link Chief Awolowo to any of the specifics of corruption. He remains untainted in the eyes of his own people. There has been no doubt that Awolowo's discrediting was one of the goals of the Federal investigation. It was because of the coalition government's failure in this, the Chief's supporters charge, that the leaders of the N.P.C. and N.C.N.C. are now attempting to link the Action Group to the fortuitously discovered presence of illegal arms in the country. There is no doubt that there actually was an armed coup d'etat planned. To prove in court that Chief Awolowo and the Action Group were behind it is another matter. Certainly a degree of gullibility is required to believe a politician as astute as Awolowo, with a mass following of thousands of Yorubas, would be involved in such an inept, fruitless endeavor.

Throughout these troubles the public behavior and pronouncements of the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, as on independence day, have been restrained and responsible. Supporting evidence of this assessment is to be found in the character of the efficient and quiet Federal administrators who have been appointed to run the Western Region during the period of government suspension. The same responsibility has not been demonstrated by other leaders of the N.P.C. and the N.C.N.C. The party press has been particularly malodorous and strident, and the scent of vengeance is in the air. Many are the old political hurts to be settled with the charismatic Awolowo.

The degradation of Awolowo and the disembowelment of the Yoruba-dominated Action Group presents no promise to the Federation. Rather they would mean the growth and perpetuation of the kind of deadly political life that goes hand in hand with unnecessary martyrs and hordes of people who feel they have lost their ethnic voice,



If "teething troubles" are not to become major illnesses then the Federal Government must "restore possible breakdown of law and order expeditiously with speed, firmness, thoroughness and fairplay demanded for the stability of orderly government and the security of the state". It is the heavy duty of Sir Abubakar to bring some speed to the thoroughness and firmness already displayed.

The continuing crisis in the Western Region was a sullen blot on independence day, 1962. Perhaps in this third year of freedom it will be determined if the emergency cast an unfairly large shadow over an otherwise marvelous day.

THE PRIME MINISTER,

ALHAJI SIR ABUBAKAR TAFAWA BALEWA

Sincerely Yours,

Charles J. Patterson

Charles J. Patterson