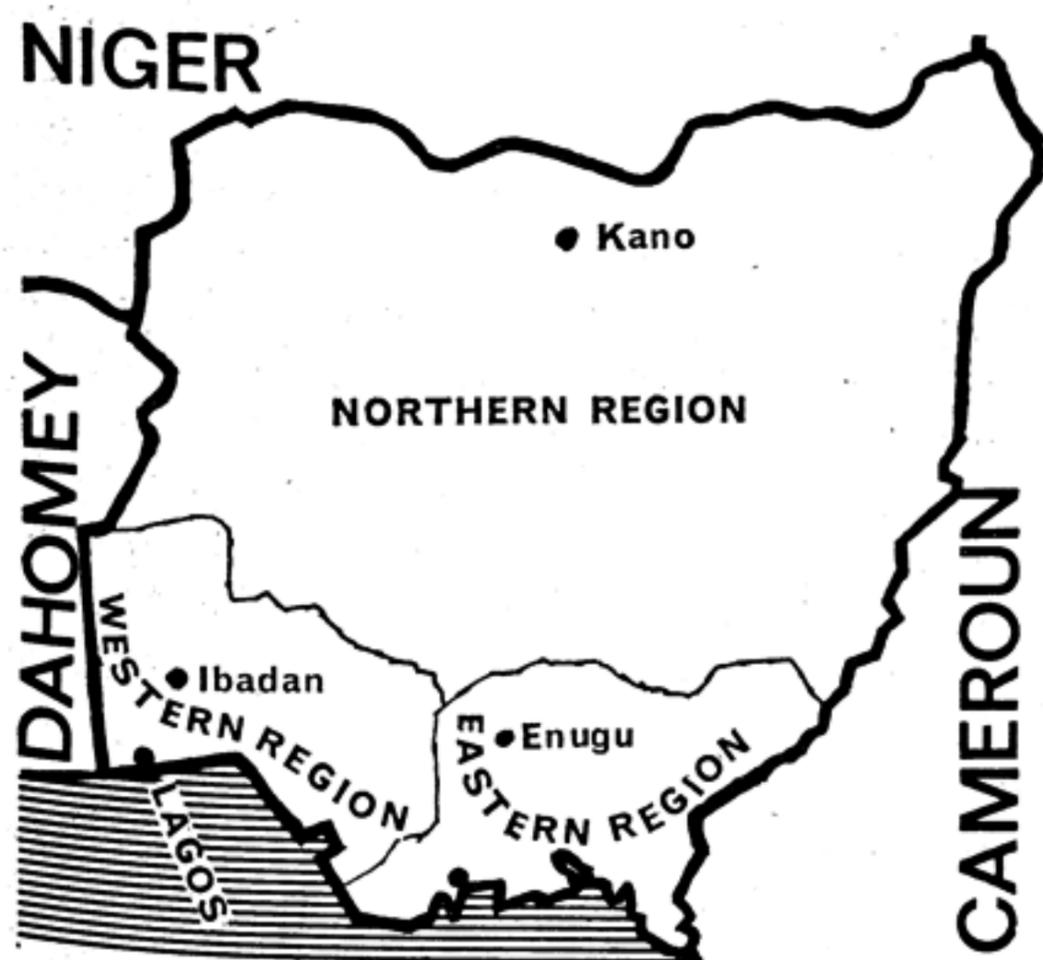


# NIGERIA'S FIRST MASS SOCIALIST PARTY

*by a Special  
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THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE of the Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party of Nigeria was held in August 1963, and by November it had already enrolled 2,000 members in twenty branches. Its officials confidently expected this membership to double by the end of the year. The greatest concentration of membership is in the capital Lagos, but there are branches in all the regions of Nigeria—eight in the Western Region, four in the mid-Western, four in the Eastern Region and three in the Northern Region. The formation of new branches was usually preceded by the staging of mass demonstrations, the largest of which brought together at least 50,000 people. Secretary-General of the new party is Dr. Tunji Otegbeye, formerly secretary-general and still a member of the Nigerian Youth Congress. The Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party is supported by many well-known trade union leaders and by the more progressive section of the Nigerian trade union movement as a whole.

The manifesto of the Party makes it plain that it accepts Marxism as the basis of its policy. 'The Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party is the party of the toilers of Nigeria, guided by Scientific Socialist ideas,



## NIGERIA



whose aim is the realisation of a Socialist Nigeria through the process of national democratic revolution. . . .’

After analysing the development of society from ancient communism through slavery and feudalism to capitalism, the manifesto adds: ‘Our era is that in which capitalism is passing away and a new system is being born. The new system is the socialist system. The message of socialism is none other than the total abolition of all exploitation of man by man. The Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917 ushered in the first socialist society in the world. By breaking the chains of imperialism, feudalism and capitalism in Russia, the workers and peasants of that great land of socialism showed mankind the road forward from the misery of feudalism and capitalism, the misery of class society. Inspired by the Russian example, the people of China broke for ever with exploitation and waged the great Chinese revolution which defeated imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic and comprador capitalism, and brought the people to power throughout the vast land of China in 1949. The great socialist revolution has spread and is spreading to other lands.

‘The socialist revolutions have greatly inspired the exploited nations of the world in their struggles to free themselves from the domination of imperialism. Colonial revolutions are sweeping through the world as part and parcel of the great revolt of the poor, the proletarian revolution. The struggles of the African and the Nigerian people form an important part of the proletarian revolution of our time.’

The Party’s manifesto makes it clear that the struggle of the African people is not only directed against the imperialists but also against the lackeys of the imperialists, the section of the African bourgeoisie which has sold itself for foreign gold.

To achieve progress, to march away from the backward past, the African must wage a determined struggle against imperialism. To this end the unity of the African people is essential. Our party is out to build up the full and unflinching support of the Nigerian people for the African revolution. In waging a battle against imperialism, however, the African people cannot ignore those classes in Africa whose aim is to collaborate with imperialism for their own selfish ends. It is a lie to picture Africa as a classless continent. Our party is committed to waging a relentless battle against the internal enemies of the African people who collaborate with imperialism.’

## **COLONIAL OPPRESSION**

The sufferings of the Nigerian people first under their own feudal rulers and later under the imperialists are graphically described in the manifesto. ‘Our people began a great struggle against colonial

oppression. In this revolt the Nigerian people aimed at three things: (a) complete independence, (b) democracy, (c) social and economic progress for everyone.

'These were the aims of the Nigerian people generally, but it is now clear that a section of the Nigerian businessmen and professionals who took part in the revolt did so in order to push out the British colonialists, set up a government of businessmen and place seekers, and use the State to enrich themselves. As for the chiefs, the majority of them opposed self-government, whilst some businessmen and professionals sided with the British colonialists.'

The manifesto catalogues the bitter strikes and struggles of the people for a better life from 1929 onwards. 'Without these bitter struggles of the people, self-government would never have been won. For oppressors respect action, not words. But it is clear that the people have been cheated. A few people have achieved their private ambition, but what the common people fought for has not been realised . . .

'Nigeria today, irrespective of ethnic group or religion, is divided into two nations: the nation of the rich made up of the rich classes and the nation of the poor made up of the poor classes.' And while the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer.

The extent of imperialist domination of the Nigerian economy is analysed in detail. Since independence, foreign investment has expanded by leaps and bounds. 'Our entire economy is dominated by the Unilever group of companies.' One-third of all goods imported into Nigeria and about one-fifth of all the products exported are handled by one Unilever subsidiary alone—the United Africa Company. American monopoly business has also established an empire for itself in Nigeria. The biggest American banking firms, Bank of America and Chase Manhattan, have opened up branches and American oil companies have sunk millions in oil exploration and distribution.

'This country is rich in resources, but it has become a flourishing garden only for foreign firms and their few Nigerian partners and hangers-on.'

As against the imperialists and their local agents and allies who want to maintain the present régime of oppression over the people, there are the actual creators of wealth of the country, and those who desire a change in Nigeria for the benefit of all—the wage and salaried workers, the farmers and peasants and the small businessmen threatened with ruin by the operations of the monopolists.

'The people need first and foremost a party of a new type, a party of workers, farmers and patriotic and progressive citizens. Such a party is the Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party of Nigeria—the Party of the oppressed . . .

‘Our party is guided by a science of society—the science of Marxism-Leninism. This is a science which brings together all the experiences of mankind in struggle and from there draws lessons for the guidance of the common people in their fight to overthrow capitalism and imperialism and build socialism . . .

‘There have been many recommendations in the past and there are still a few today on how the struggle for socialism should be waged to achieve success. But it is only in countries where the battle for socialism has been guided by the Marxist-Leninist science of socialist struggle that the battle has actually been won and socialism established. Every worker, every farmer, every artisan relies not on a tool that looks beautiful but cannot do the work but on one that has been proved by experience to be strong and equal to the appointed task. Such a tool is the science of Marxism-Leninism, the reliable science of socialist revolution which can be applied in any country at any stage of development to guide and enlighten the people.’

## **UNITED FRONT**

The manifesto recognises that apart from the workers and peasants there are other groups in Nigeria that also wish to change the present state of things in Nigeria in the direction of true independence, democracy and progress—progressive businessmen, professionals and intellectuals who oppose neo-colonialism and desire a democratic rule of the people in a truly independent Nigeria. ‘A national democratic united front becomes a revolutionary necessity. We call on all progressive and patriotic businessmen, professionals, intellectuals, youths, women, ethnic organisations, students, ex-servicemen, the anti-imperialist fighters in other parties and other democratic sections of our people to rally round our party and build a national democratic united front of the people against imperialism.’

Having defeated imperialism and its allies, the revolution will establish a state of independent national democracy. ‘The state will: (a) achieve true as distinct from nominal independence; (b) establish true democracy in which the common people will have real and not merely nominal power; (c) carry out progressive economic and social reforms.’ Ultimately the nation will have to choose between capitalism and socialism. Capitalism is immoral because it is based on the exploitation of man by man. ‘Therefore the nation must go in the direction of socialism. By socialism we mean the ownership of the means of production and distribution (mines, factories, banks, etc.) by the community as a whole, so as to end the exploitation of one man by another, to end the division of the country into rich and poor, the

powerful and the weak. The movement to socialism in Nigeria can only proceed by stages, but our advance must be in that direction.'

### **THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM WILL NOT BE EASY**

The enemies of the people, says the manifesto, are not asleep. They are busy inventing all sorts of 'socialisms' to confuse the people. 'We hear of "pragmatic socialism," "democratic socialism," "conventional socialism," "commonwealth socialism," "Arab socialism," "African socialism," "Fabian socialism," "Christian socialism," "agrarian socialism" and what you will. Some who call themselves socialists have even come out to say that socialism means whatever anyone cares to mean by it.

'The reason for this multiplication of "socialisms" is obvious. Everywhere in the world, everywhere in Africa, everywhere in Nigeria the people are dissatisfied with capitalism and find no alternative other than turning towards socialism as the answer to their problems, as the only system that can give them independence, food, clothing, shelter, education, health, justice and peace. Since the enemies of the people cannot turn the people away from the path of socialism, they have to pose as interpreters of socialism. Thus every corrupt nationalist, every opportunist politician, every barely progressive liberal finds the label "socialism" useful to cover up actions, policies and programmes that are essentially capitalist.'

It is true, says the manifesto, that many differences exist between one country and another. Experience has shown that precisely because of such differences the form of struggle for socialism will vary from one country to another, but the struggle for socialism has everywhere to be guided by the socialist science of struggle which is Marxism-Leninism. Socialism is not a foreign ideology. It is a system opposed to capitalism, and wherever capitalism exists, socialist thought and struggle must arise to liberate the people from exploitation. 'Just as Nigerian capitalism is Nigerian, so is Nigerian socialist thought Nigerian. . . . There is nothing foreign to any people in the idea that the wealth of the land should belong to the people in common and that the fruits of such wealth be fairly distributed to all.'

The long-term aim of the Party is to transform Nigeria into a truly Socialist Democracy which will guarantee for the people of Nigeria:

(a) all social rights—the right to work, education, rest and leisure, and to social security;

(b) full unrestricted suffrage—all Nigerian people to enjoy equal social status irrespective of birth, sex, religion or ethnic origin;

(c) the opportunity to take a direct part in the management of production and in the distribution of the fruits of their labour;

(d) the radical solution of the women's question—equal opportunity to both man and woman in our society;

(e) the conditions for genuinely solving the question of the different ethnic groupings and minorities in our society and ensuring their rapid social, cultural and economic advancement.

However, the short-term aims of the Party in the present situation when neo-colonialism and their agents constitute the main enemy of the Nigerian people is to defeat neo-colonialism, isolate its agents and attain complete independence. For this purpose the Party will strive to secure and guarantee:

(a) a strong united conscious labour movement;

(b) a strong united conscious alliance among the people of our country;

(c) a strong United National Democratic Front of all anti-neo-colonialist and anti-feudalist forces in the country;

(d) the attainment of complete national independence (social cultural and economic) and the establishment of a popular National Democracy in which the entire masses of our people will play a fundamentally new role in the life of our society.

At the end of the manifesto the party sets out in detail its programme for the reconstruction of the Nigerian society under five headings: Political Objectives, Economic Objectives, Social Objectives, Policy on Africa and International Policy. Its African policy is to fight for the immediate independence of all African countries, the unity of all African states and the abolition of all foreign bases on African soil.

'In the realm of world affairs we shall:

'Fight actively for peace, for our revolution is endangered and retarded so long as the great powers arm for war;

'Support the fight of all nations to self-determination, for the denial of self-determination to any one country is one step to its denial to other countries;

'Support the cause of all countries fighting against imperialism;

'Support the cause of progress—of the workers and farmers of all countries against cheating and backwardness.'

The programme concludes: 'These specific steps shall pave the way for the people to build a free socialist society where wealth shall begin to be distributed according to the principle, from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'

The Nigerian Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party is the first socialist party in Nigeria with a fully Marxist programme and a mass base. If it can survive the attacks which will undoubtedly be directed against it by the ruling class as it gathers strength, it can play an important role in the development of socialism in Nigeria.