

NIGERIA—THE FIRST DECADE

KEN POST

Assistant Lecturer in Government at the University College of Nigeria, Ibadan

OUTSIDE observers tend to adopt two lines of approach to the new States of Africa. Most of the time the approach is conditioned by the cold war between East and West—are they for us or against us? Less often, perhaps because it requires more work, the approach involves assiduous name-dropping weighted by abstruse references—what about the influence of X? Don't forget the historical rivalry of the Ys and Zs! Both approaches do little service to the object of attention. The East-West struggle is not the struggle of the new States, and it is for them to make up their own minds about taking part. On the other hand, they are now sovereign entities, with a place in international politics and exposed to the battle of ideas, and it is unwise to try to explain everything in terms of tribe and personality.

Nigeria is especially open to both these approaches. It is assumed to be "safe for the West"—despite articles in the *'Sunday Telegraph'*—while, on the other hand, its great size and diversity allow a wide choice of names to be dropped. What should be emphasised is the close inter-relationship between a country's internal condition and its external behaviour, and some of the features likely to be significant in the first crucial decade of independence.

First of all, despite the protracted negotiations and discussions which preceded independence, the balance in the constitution between various political forces in Nigeria is by no means finally resolved. An acute observer of the Nigerian political scene, Ayo Ogunsheye, has remarked:

"Majority Nigerian opinion has chosen the federal form of government as the best constitutional framework for maintaining unity in diversity. . . . As for the party system, it is nowhere more virile in tropical Africa than in Nigeria."¹

There now seems little likelihood that the Federation will disintegrate in the near future, in contrast to the threats of secession in 1953-54. That does not mean, however, that the political system has been established in its final form. Machinery

¹"Nigeria's Political Prospects", *'Ibadan'*, Number Eleven, February 1961.

has already been set in motion to create another Region, the 'Mid-West State', to be carved out of Western Nigeria, and there is talk of extending the Lagos Federal Territory at the expense of the West. It is significant that the West is controlled by the Action Group, which forms the Opposition in the Federal Parliament. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.), which controls the East, and the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.), which controls the North, will not agree to the slicing of new Regions from their own domains, and while they control the Federal government they have nothing to fear in this respect. Moreover, in an attempt to force an enquiry into the Action Group's financial affairs, they pushed through a bill at the end of July which has important implications for the legal powers of the Federal government.

The existence of three major parties is the almost accidental result of the evolution of a federal constitution in Nigeria. The Action Group greatly strengthened its hold on the West in Regional elections held just before independence, and the separation of the Mid-West will drastically reduce the strength of the N.C.N.C. Opposition in the Western House; in May 1961, the N.P.C. won 160 out of 170 seats in the Northern House of Assembly; it seems certain that the N.C.N.C. will win all but a few of the 146 new seats in the Eastern House. Each Region then is rapidly evolving a one-party system; it is as yet uncertain whether the N.C.N.C. or the Action Group will control the new Mid-West State. Moreover, the N.P.C. has still not attempted to recruit members outside the North, though it has made alliances with some minor Southern parties. The Action Group's attempt to seek support outside the West by championing ethnic minorities has foundered on the refusal by the other parties to allow any new Regions to be carved out of the East and North. The popular support which the N.C.N.C. found throughout the Federation in the Federal election of 1959 was primarily the result of its reputation as the vanguard of the nationalist movement since 1944, and the capital collected in this way must rapidly be expended now that independence is a fact. Moreover, the N.C.N.C. lost a considerable asset when Dr. Azikiwe resigned its leadership to become Governor-General.

The swearing-in of Dr. Azikiwe as Governor-General in November 1960—Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became

Prime Minister after the N.C.N.C. and N.P.C. had formed a coalition Federal government after the December 1959 election—sealed the pact between the two parties. With Dr. Azikiwe in limbo as President of the Senate for some months after the election, there was speculation over how long the coalition could last. It seemed an alliance of such obvious irreconcilables. Yet it has worked so far, and despite rumours shows few signs of stress. It is difficult to account for this. The N.C.N.C., led in the main by the businessmen, educationalists and lawyers of the East, a nationalist movement in its origins, with a strong radical element, seems a strange ally for the N.P.C., led by men associated with traditional authority, often from aristocratic families, concerned with the special interests of the predominantly Muslim North. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the major interest of both parties was in the power immediately to be gained at the end of 1959.

The distribution of seats among Regions in the Federal House of Representatives meant that whichever party controlled the North would have to be included in the Federal government. The Action Group had sought to wrest control of the North from the N.P.C. The N.C.N.C., on the other hand, had guessed that the N.P.C. would win and sought an alliance with it. In doing so, the N.C.N.C. dealt a bitter blow to the Northern Elements' Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.), the N.P.C.'s oldest opponent in the North and an ally of the N.C.N.C. since 1954. N.E.P.U., which claims to stand for the rights of the *talakawa*, or commoners, in the North against the *sarakuna*, or men of authority, has been seriously embarrassed by the appointment of its leader as Deputy Chief Whip of the N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. Federal coalition. The N.P.C., knowing that it could preserve the North inviolate if it were the dominant partner in the Federal coalition, seems to have felt that the N.C.N.C. was to be preferred as an ally to the Action Group. The N.C.N.C. had intervened in Northern politics only through its alliance with N.E.P.U., while the Action Group had spent vast sums in 1959 in order to harry the N.P.C. directly in places where it had felt itself most secure. The Western party had received few enough votes in return for its expenditure, but it had greatly disquieted the N.P.C. leaders.

The Action Group's reaction to the apparent interest of the other two major parties in power rather than in ideas is an interesting one. Its manifesto for independence, 'Democratic

Socialism', declared that "the period of transition is over", and that the next stage required the building of a "socialist society". "New loyalties to class interests are gradually replacing the traditional loyalties", while "political programmes and arguments are at bottom the objectives and views of definite economic classes and groups." This attempt by the Action Group to find an 'ideological' basis for its actions may be compared with the speedy disavowal by the N.C.N.C. leaders of a pamphlet published at independence by Mokwugo Okoye, one of the young radicals in the party, which also spoke of "socialist planning" and a "socialist Welfare State", envisaging public ownership of banks, mines, long-distance transport, foreign trade and other enterprises.

It is open to question, however, whether any of the major parties can find a policy enabling it to control and direct the forces of social and economic change which are beginning to be felt in Nigeria. Having attained independence and brought all Nigerians into contact with the political system for the first time—eighty per cent. of the nine million electors voted in 1959—they may think they have done all they might be expected to do in their present form. Two groups in Nigeria in particular are of growing importance, and neither is necessarily attached to any of the major parties—the increasing numbers of teachers, civil servants and technicians who are essential for future development, and the growing body of primary school-leavers who either cannot find jobs at all or who are employed at a level they feel to be beneath them.

In 1960 a most important report, *Investment in Education*, was published by the Federal Ministry of Education. In this, a commission headed by Sir Eric Ashby made "massive, expensive and unconventional" recommendations for changes in higher education to provide the more than 80,000 senior and intermediate personnel necessary for Nigeria's development in the decade 1960-70; in 1960 there were only 30,000 of these, 10,000 of them expatriates. These 80,000 men and women will have an importance far beyond their numbers in Nigeria during the next decade, both while they are being trained and after they have begun to direct the development of the schools, hospitals, roads, factories, mills and other projects required to raise Nigeria's standard of living. Yet these people will be the ones best able to see and most hostile to the "waste in public spending through kick-backs on contracts and the

'influence' of foreign business concerns who are able to bribe their way through in high places," mentioned by Ayo Ogunshye in his article for 'Ibadan'. They will be readily susceptible to demands for a radical programme of reform, a programme which none of the major parties would in its present form be able to meet.

On another level is the second key group of the future, those leaving primary school. Since 1951 the Regional governments have made great efforts to provide school places. The Eastern and Western governments are devoting nearly fifty per cent. of their annual expenditures to primary and secondary education, which is a Regional matter, while the Northern government spends nearly forty per cent. This proportion is likely to rise in the future. Yet the campaign for universal primary education has meant that by December 1960 there were already some two and a half times the number of school-leavers looking for jobs in the West than in December 1959. In the East there were 10,000 more school-leavers. Even in the North, which has lagged far behind the others in modern education, there is growing pressure for universal primary education. Yet, as Arch C. Callaway has shown in an interesting series of articles,² the number of jobs available to school-leavers cannot keep pace at the moment with the increase in their numbers. In the past, education has been the key to a better life in Nigeria. In the future, it seems likely to lead to growing dissatisfaction, unless a radical, even revolutionary, programme of development can be launched to absorb this group. The apparently conservative nature of the present Nigerian governments is particularly significant since any such programme of reform would involve far-reaching changes in land-tenure, requiring the sacrifice of practices sanctioned by centuries of usage. Yet without a bold programme, these unemployed or underemployed school-leavers could provide the rank and file for any new political movement directed against the present parties and their governments.

The politicians are aware of this and they are alarmed. Already a new Nigerian Youth Congress has sprung into being, radical in tone and directing its appeal to youth and the intellectuals. The Dynamic Party of Dr. Chike Obi, with its emphasis on the need for a régime like that of Kemal Ataturk, seems to be preparing for a greater organisational effort. When Dr. Obi issued a pamphlet attacking the present Nigerian leaders as

²'School Leavers in Nigeria', *West Africa*, 25 March—15 April, 1961.

unrepresentative of the people, he was charged with sedition by the Federal government and found guilty. This sort of reaction seems to suggest a basic lack of confidence on the part of the present major parties.

It is most unlikely, however, that any completely new party made up principally of discontented intellectuals and young school-leavers could command enough votes to come to power, though it might possibly secure enough influence in the army and Federal police to attempt a coup. The forces of the 'left' are numerically weak in Nigeria today, lacking even the support of the trade union movement. Most unions are small and ill-organised, while there are two rival trade union congresses, one supporting the Ghana-Guinea backed All-Africa Trade Union Federation, the other valuing more its links with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (I.C.F.T.U.). Nevertheless, both Southern major parties contain potentially radical elements; even the Action Group, the most business-dominated and closely linked to foreign firms, contains the former leaders of the pseudo-Marxist United Working People's Party. In the East about a year ago, members of both the N.C.N.C. and the Action Group came together in an abortive Socialist Group. If, under pressure from social and economic developments which seemed to be escaping its control, one of these parties came to be dominated by a radically minded group, there would be a decisive shift in the direction of Nigerian politics. Even then the radicals would have to face the opposition of most, if not all of the leaders of the very conservative N.P.C., which controls more than half the country.

All this is speculation. What is certain is that a full appreciation of the factors involved and a clear idea of what must be done are essential, if the problems of the future are to be tackled and solved. The Ashby Commission's estimate of costs for its proposals totals between £89 and £113 millions over the next ten years. The 35,000,000 people of Nigeria demand much more than increased facilities for higher education. They need better medical facilities, for instance, since nearly forty per cent. of all children still die before reaching puberty. Nigeria is not a poor country, as the new African States go. Yet her annual income per head was reckoned at only £30 in 1957, and there is a great disparity in wealth between North and South. In 1960 there was an adverse trade balance of well over £50,000,000, with exports at £160,000,000 and imports at

£215,000,000. The export value of groundnuts, one of Nigeria's main products, fell from £38 to £35 millions, and cocoa, another staple, from £27.5 to £22 millions. The prospect for cocoa on the world market continues to look grim. If Nigeria is to finance development primarily from her own resources, its reserves may well have to be run down to the last shilling. In addition, private investment and loans and grants by foreign governments will have to be sought. In June Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, the N.C.N.C. Federal Minister of Finance, began a world tour in search of investment and loans, and we must wait to see the measure of his success. It is also impossible to foresee the effects upon Nigeria's trade of Britain's entry into the European Common Market. Although Nigeria has the advantages of a large potential internal market and newly discovered petroleum deposits, it also has the task of satisfying the demands of 35,000,000 people who expect to see the conditions of their lives rapidly improved. Size is a dubious advantage, if it makes the economy's initial "take-off" so much more difficult.

In foreign relations, Nigeria's size has been the dominant factor since independence. It has been generally accepted that, as the largest African country in terms of population, Nigeria would have a leading voice in Pan-African affairs. The snag has been that Ghana, independent since 1957, dominated by one party and led by a man of great ability and ambition, has tended to "speak for Africa" in the last few years. Nigeria has found itself therefore at the head of the 'Monrovia' group of African States, much more cautious in their approach to African unity than the radical 'Casablanca' group of which Ghana, Guinea and the United Arab Republic are prominent members. It is significant that Chief Awolowo, the Action Group leader, who as late as 1960 was the bitterest Nigerian critic of Presidents Nkrumah and Nasser, supported Nigeria's alignment with the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union after his recent visit to Accra. How far this represents a genuine change of heart and how far it is the result of opposition to the N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. Federal government is difficult to estimate.

Equally difficult to assess is Chief Awolowo's change in attitude towards neutralism in world affairs. During the 1959 election campaign he described any such position as "an unmitigated disservice to humanity", and repeated these words in his autobiography, published at the time of independence. Yet the Action Group manifesto, published at that time, declared:

“Nigeria should cooperate with all nations, from whichever bloc, that strive to fulfil or promote the ideals of Democratic Socialism for which we stand.”

The Action Group also bitterly opposed the defence pact signed by Britain and Nigeria. On the surface, such moves appear to be part of the conventional battle for power in the Federation. It remains to be seen how strongly the Action Group will continue to press this line, and how much support it will win for the party among those who are conscious of Nigeria's rôle in the new Africa.

The Federal government, besides following a line which puts Nigeria on the whole in the Western camp, is also involved in certain specific problems. Opposition to the South African Republic, because of that country's racial policies, and to France, because of the nuclear tests in the Sahara, continues. The North is attracted to Egypt and other Muslim countries because of religious and cultural links, and this sometimes arouses alarm among Southerners. Of great potential importance is the problem of Nigeria's eastern frontier with the Southern Cameroons, when that territory joins the Cameroun Republic in October. Unrest in the Cameroons may very well result; and if this leads to frontier violations, a very difficult situation could arise, especially since most of the Nigerian army is committed in the Congo.

In foreign affairs as in domestic matters, Nigeria thus has potential troubles enough of its own. It seems to do Nigeria little service to behave as if it were irrevocably involved on the side of the 'Free World'. Nigeria has problems, and yet these tend to be obscured by the sort of self-congratulation which fills the British newspapers when comparisons are made with the ex-Belgian Congo. It is the duty of outsiders to see Nigeria's problems in terms of Nigeria's own needs, not of her position in a world conflict which is not her quarrel. If a democratic political system is to be preserved, in face of a possible realignment of forces which might lead to authoritarian pressures from 'left' or 'right', if the necessary cadre of trained personnel is to be created, and if the economic and social development of the country is to proceed, then Nigeria must be given help when this is requested, and with no strings attached. Outsiders must show that they have a sympathetic understanding of Nigeria's particular problems and not merely a keen appreciation of their own interests.