

Constitutional Matrix of the Evolution of the Nigerian Political Party System, 1914 – 1960

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ABSTRACT

One can say without fear of contradiction that no political parties were discernible in the Nigerian traditional set-up. This is true, whether one thinks of the relatively decentralized and consensual societies of the TIV or IGBO, in which political matters are discussed at length before reaching decision binding on all; or whether, as among the BINIS and HAUSAS one recalls highly centralized, authoritarian social systems. What is said of the Nigerian ethnic groups, applies **mutatis mutandis**, to the British colonial system in early Nigeria. Though the British had evolved a highly sophisticated political system complete with parties before they colonized Nigeria, the colonial system until the 1920s was devoid of political parties. This being so, the question may be asked, how did political parties become part and parcel of the Nigerian political system? Did the parties develop in response to constitutionally provided opportunities, or did they owe their origin to other sources? What part did they play or not in forcing the pace of constitutional change? These are some of the questions the paper sets out to explore. To facilitate such exploration, this author will take the major parties one after the other, and examine their origins, structure and aims, as well as their position vis-à-vis constitutional change from the time of the 1914 amalgamation until 1960, more or less. Some of the parties, small in adherence and influence will not be considered as nothing worthwhile will be gained from the exercise.

INTRODUCTION:

EVOLUTION OF PARTY SYSTEM UNIVERSALLY

According to Rowe (1969, 1979 reprint p.70), "the political parties in a polity taken together make up a party system". On the other hand, Coleman and Rosberg, (1970:2) define political parties as:

Associations formally organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and/or maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition or electoral competition with, other associations, over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or prospective state.

These definitions underpin the study which follows.

In the introduction to his trailblazing seminal study, **Political Parties, Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State**, first published in 1951, Duverger (p. xxiii) is at pains to point out that in 1850 no country in the world (except the United States) knew political parties in the modern sense of the word. There were, according to him, trends of opinion, popular clubs, philosophical

societies, and parliamentary groups, but no real parties. In 1950, he continues, parties function in most civilized nations, and in others there is an attempt to imitate them.

In the foreword to Duverger's study, D. W. Brogan points out that the modern party system is indeed modern. It is a twentieth century mechanism designed to solve the problem of how to bring 'the people', the new mass voters, into the political community (Duverger p. viii). He further points out that to bring the masses into the political system means to encourage parties that are not mere aggregates of local and personal interest, but parties that give or profess to give to the man in the street a voice in politics that he cannot have if all he is given as a political choice is between one group of notables and another (Duverger, p. ix). And Duverger himself points out that on the whole the development of parties seems bound up with that of democracy, that is to say with the extension of popular suffrage and parliamentary prerogatives. The more political assemblies see their functions and independence grow, the more their members feel the need to group themselves according to what they have in common, so as to act in concert. The more the right to vote is extended and multiplied, the more necessary it becomes to organize the electors by means of committees capable of making the candidates known and canalizing the votes in their direction. The rise of parties is thus bound up with the rise of parliamentary groups and electoral committees. Duverger recognizes that exceptions to this trend are not lacking as some parties deviate more or less from this general scheme. They originate outside the electoral and parliamentary cycle, and this fact is their most outstanding common characteristic (p. xxiiif). Duverger goes on to distinguish between **Electoral and parliamentary Origin of parties** on the one hand, and **Extra-parliamentary origins of parties**, on the other.

ELECTORAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ORIGIN OF PARTIES

The general mechanism of this genesis, according to Duverger, is simple. First there is the creation of parliamentary groups, then the appearance of electoral committees, and finally the establishment of a permanent connection between these two elements. In practice there are various departures from this strict theoretical scheme. There have usually been parliamentary groups before electoral committees. Indeed there were political assemblies before there were elections (p. xxiv). The emergence of local electoral committees, Duverger further points out, is directly linked with the extension of popular suffrage; this makes it necessary to bring the new electors into the party. For example, the adoption of universal suffrage brought about the expansion of the socialist parties that occurred in most European countries as the twentieth century opened. However, such mechanical extension of the suffrage is not the only factor in the birth of local committees: the development of egalitarian feelings and the desire to oust traditional social elites is another without which the first would have no effect (p. xxvii).

EXTRA - PARLIAMENTARY ORIGINS OF PARTIES

Here Duverger is at pains to point out that the distinction between externally created parties and parties created within the electoral and parliamentary

framework is not rigorous. It denotes, according to him, general tendencies rather than clearly differentiated types, with the result that it is often difficult to apply in practice. In a fairly large number of cases, however, the shape of a party is essentially established by a pre-existing institution of which the true activities lie outside elections and parliament: it is then accurate to speak of creation from without (p. xxx). The groups and associations which may thus bring about the birth of a political party are very numerous and most varied. Duverger goes on to give examples: Trade unions, philosophical societies, student associations and university groups, Free Masons, churches and Religious sects and Ex-service men's Associations, Leagues, secret societies and clandestine groups, industrial and commercial groups (p. xxxi – xxxiv).

Whatever their origin, Duverger continues, parties which have come into being outside parliament offer a marked contrast with parties arising within the electoral and parliamentary cycle. Electoral and parliamentary creation seems to correspond to an old type and extra-parliamentary creation to a modern type. Up to 1900 the greater number of political parties arose in the first way. We find very few extra parliamentary interventions before the birth of socialist parties at the beginning of the [twentieth] century. From that time on, however, creation outside parliament becomes the rule and creation within parliament becomes the exception (p. xxxvi).

The discussion hitherto is concerned with what Duverger regards as the "civilized" world of Europe and the USA. Before he is done, Duverger discusses the subject as it relates to those countries "new to democracy", that is to say, countries where political assemblies and universal suffrage have scarcely begun to function properly: here the development of parties conforms to the first type described. In other words, the first type described corresponds to the creation of political parties in a country where no system of organized parties yet exists. As soon as such a system is at work, the second type of creation becomes the more usual (p. xxxvif).

In their work, **Political Sociology** (1972, 1983 reprint), Dowse and Hughes point out that it has been suggested that the political party is the creation of a particular kind of political society. They point out that the term "political party" emerged in the nineteenth century with the beginning of representative government and the expansion of the suffrage in Europe and the United States. Then it designated a group of people whose aim was to capture public office in electoral competition with one or more other such groups. Later, of course, the term was extended to include organizations not directly engaged in electoral competition, such as minor parties with virtually no hope of providing serious electoral rivalry, revolutionary parties working outside an elective framework and the governing parties in totalitarian and dictatorial societies.

The political party, then, is a type of political organization which emerges when the activities of a political system reach a certain degree of complexity which requires the development of new and wider political forms. In particular, the requirement encouraging the emergence of parties is when those who seek to win or maintain political power, within a large-scale and complex political system,

need to seek the support of the larger public (p. 341). Continuing they point out that the influence of social crises is argued to be crucial, especially crises of **legitimacy**, **participation** and **integration**. Here the suggestion is that the development of political systems often involves crises characterized by such systemic experiences as movements from a traditional to a more modern polity, changes in demographic patterns, modes of production, stratification systems, and the like, which involve a recasting of existing institutions or the development of new institutions. So far as the political system is concerned, the three types of crises mentioned above seem the most crucial. In practice, each of these crises, while analytically distinct, may well be compounded. This is especially true of late-modernizing societies (Ibid.).

LEGITIMACY

In Europe, Dowse and Hughes maintain, legitimacy was the issue around which some of the earliest parties were created. As the demands for popular participation and a devolution of centralized authority began to threaten the legitimacy of the existing structures of authority, as in late eighteenth-century France, revolutionary groups began to assume a popular character, seeking much of their support from the population hitherto excluded from having an autonomous political role, the peasantry, the artisan and the bourgeoisie (Ibid.). They go on to point out that similarly, nationalist movements are often the result of legitimacy crises. They frequently begin as small groups of men concerned with increasing their influence on colonial governments by opening up the opportunities for indigenous political participation. If the colonial administration refuses to allow the demands, the nationalist groups find it necessary to broaden its support among the people and, in the process, develops a political party organization. Of course, once the active electorate becomes larger and national parliaments have evolved, the tasks of political recruitment and of bringing the new citizenry into the process of policy formation and decision making can no longer be handled by a small coterie of men but instead necessitate new modes of political organization. So, what hitherto had been simply fairly loose coteries of legislators began to see the need to organize the new electorate (p. 342).

PARTICIPATION

Here Dowse and Hughes point out that not all political parties owe their origins to what one might call the legislators' 'need' to control their constituencies. Others, and here the classic examples are the socialist parties in Europe, were externally created. Such parties are often, though not exclusively, associated with the crises of participation: the demand of new or existing but excluded groups for a more participatory role in government. In the developing societies of Africa and Asia, Dowse and Hughes maintain, more of the now functioning parties were formerly based on nationalist movements that arose outside the governing framework (Ibid.). Participation crises brought about by new group demands being placed on the system nearly always, additionally, involve a legitimacy crisis, and a threat to the position of the ruling group, especially if the ruling group proves insensitive to the demands of those seeking greater participation. In other words, externally

created parties are often born of a situation out of which they derive less commitment to the existing social, political and economic institutions (p. 343).

INTEGRATION

The problem of territorial integrity plus the process by which divided ethnic communities come to accommodate themselves to each other, have also provided the context in which parties have first, emerged. According to Dowse and Hughes, in Europe, parties in Germany, Italy and Belgium emerged during such crises. In Belgium, the struggle between the Flemish and the Walloons created ethnic parties, and in present day Canada, French separatist parties [still thrive]. In India, the Muslim League expanded into a mass party with the integration crises associated with the partition of the subcontinent. Elsewhere in Asia, religious, linguistic and tribal groups have organized political parties in opposition to the predominant political group. They conclude that thus, the occurrence of political parties is related to the crises experienced by extensively developed polities (Ibid). For Martin Slann (1998) political parties certainly seemed to develop as an outgrowth of the democratic process. As the franchise (right to vote) was extended in the democracies during the nineteenth century, parties evolved as vehicles for winning elections. Parties were unnecessary before voters and elections existed; officeholders who were appointed to or inherited their positions had little need to form political organizations, preferring instead to develop and rely on personal followings (p. 164f).

What this author has examined so far is just some of the extant literature on the origin of the party system on the world scale. Next the paper takes a panoramic view of the African scene, again in general, as a prelude to the discussion of the issue with particular reference to Nigeria.

EVOLUTION OF PARTIES IN AFRICA

Quite a lot has been written about the origin of political parties and the party system in Africa. A few examples of such writing suffice. Coleman in C. Grove Haines (ed.) (1955:234f) averred that:

The really decisive factor—the precipitant—in the formation of political parties had been constitutional reform providing for (1) the devolution by the imperial government of a sufficiently meaningful and attractive measure of power to induce or provoke nationalist leaders to convert their movements into political parties, and (2) the introduction of refinements of institutions and procedures, such as electoral system, which would make it technically possible for parties to seek power constitutionally.

Hodgkin (1961) on the other hand pointed out that African political parties arose from the colonial situation – the subservient group trying to modify its relationship with the dominant group (p. 21). For Dowse and Hughes, most African political parties historically sprang out of self-improvement organizations, literary societies and tribal associations of one kind and another (p. 382). Jordan (1978) stated that in the Western political tradition political parties were usually established to

contest elections and to consolidate political alliances in a legislative body. He went on to point out that this was true in one respect of the parties of English-speaking West Africa. But, he insisted that the early African nationalist parties were also concerned "...that the direction and control of the government ...shall pass into the hands of the people and their chiefs at the shortest possible time" (p. 20). Much later in the same work, he goes on to point out that parties are at the heart of western political development, and that they entered African political systems as the result of European influence. But, again he insisted that the origins of parties in West Africa were different to those of Europe. West African nationalists formed what were later called parties out of various social, cultural or religious groups, which gradually became identified with cultural and political opposition to colonial rule (p. 105). Nwabuzor and Mueller (1985) approvingly quoting Morgenthau (1964) opine that African political parties, whose antecedents go back to the voluntary associations of the late nineteenth century, are among the oldest existing national political institutions in many parts of Africa (see Morgenthau, p. 330), but they hasten to add that parties developed according to African rather than European expectations and were Africanized long before other governmental institutions (p. 151f).

This author will bear all these in mind when discussing the evolution of the party system in Nigeria, but first a brief history of the entity called NIGERIA will provide the contextual ambience for the discussion.

NIGERIA: POLITICAL EVOLUTION

It is now trite, but worth restating all the same that British colonialism created the entity today called Nigeria. Of course, Britain did not consciously plan to create an independent Nigerian Nation. The acquisition of the territory was piecemeal, beginning with the annexation of Lagos in 1861. In this year, the British government had annexed the settlement of Lagos as a colony, ostensibly for the purpose of stopping slave trade. For twenty years however, it was under the jurisdiction of the governor of the West African Settlements, resident in Sierra Leone (1866-1874), and the governor of the Gold Coast Colony (1874-1866). Lagos was finally severed from the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in the same year (1886) that the Royal Niger Company was given its charter and the Oil Rivers Protectorate was established in the Niger Delta area. With the further incursion into the hinterland along the River Niger, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was expanded with the establishment of Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893. In 1900 the Niger Coast Protectorate became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and six years later it was amalgamated with Lagos under the title of Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1903, Britain proclaimed the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria; and finally, in 1914, the two protectorates (Northern and Southern) were amalgamated to form the colony and protectorate of Nigeria (see Coleman 1958, 1986 reprint and Crowder 1966). That is why 1914 marks the commencement of our time purview, since it was the date when NIGERIA emerged as a political unit known to the world and to the peoples living within its boundaries – at least, the discerning ones among them.

PRELUDE TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

As pointed out above, before the 1914 amalgamation by Sir, later Frederick Lord Lugard, the country was part of the so-called British Colonial possessions in West Africa. It was therefore not surprising that initial nationalist movements tended to agitate for the independence of the whole of British West Africa colonial "possessions". With particular reference to Nigeria, some of the western educated minority in coastal towns such as Lagos and Calabar, anxious for constitutional representation, participated in the activities of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), led by J. Casely Hayford, a distinguished Gold Coast lawyer and early nationalist leader.

The NCBWA was interested in uniting the four British West African colonies of The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Nigeria in the demand for self-determination. "We desire", announced the Gold Coast leader and convener of the NCBWA, Casely Hayford in his inaugural address, "as the intelligentsia of our people, to promote unity among our people", and the aims of unity, however tentatively stated, were equality and freedom. The NCBWA maintained branches in each colony, while its headquarters were in Cape Coast, in the Gold Coast.

In the period immediately following the First World War, the NCBWA was working together as a unit. It sent a deputation to London in 1920. In the petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies it demanded for:

- 1) A Legislative council in each territory, half of whose members would be elected Africans;
- 2) African veto over taxation;
- 3) Separation of the judiciary from the legislative branch of the government;
- 4) Appointment and deposition of chiefs by their own people;
- 5) Abolition of racial discrimination in the civil service;
- 6) Development of municipal government;
- 7) Repeal of certain "obnoxious" ordinances;
- 8) Regulation of immigration of Syrians and other non-Africans;
- 9) Establishment of a university in West Africa.

(see Coleman 1986:191f; also Crowder, p. 254f).

The petition was rejected by the Secretary of State, Lord Milner. That was not all. The Governor of Nigeria, Sir Hugh Clifford who succeeded Lord Lugard, speaking in the Nigerian Council attacked the NCBWA in scathing terms as being unrepresentative of West Africans as a whole. And as for the Nigerian supporters of the Congress, Clifford denounced and repudiated them in no uncertain terms. Coleman summarizes the Governor's speech under four headings – that is, in as much as it related to Nigeria:

- a) The idea of Nigeria as a nation was inconceivable, and the government was determined to oppose its development;
- b) National self-government was a concept applicable only to "self-contained and mutually independent native states";

- c) True patriotism and nationalism were sentiments that must be directed to those "natural units",
- d) The question of ultimate control of the superstructure binding these separate states together in a modern political unit was then outside the realm of permissible discussion

(Coleman, 1986:194; 194 see also Crowder, p. 255f).

Sir Clifford's speech expressed the hostility of the government to the NCBWA. It revealed government's attitude towards the concept of self-government, patriotism, nationality and nation (Coleman, 1986:194; also Ezera 1964:26). The resolutions were rejected, but this did not stop the Nigerian people, particularly the western educated elite of the time, from re-evaluating their relationship with white imperialism.

THE NCBWA AND THE CLIFFORD CONSTITUTION

Despite his scathing attack on the NCBWA however, two years later, Sir Hugh Clifford introduced in the Nigerian Council the constitution which now bears his name. On his recommendation, the Colonial Office approved the establishment of the new legislative council with the concession of the elective principle, which however, was limited to Lagos and Calabar. The reason, as Ezera (p. 31) points out, was that Lagos and Calabar were at that time the only places that had sufficiently large numbers of enlightened citizens considered to be able to use the franchise.

Commenting on it all Price (1977:38) writes:

Despite his scathing attack on the National Congress of British West Africa, Clifford proved to be liberal in his attitude towards genuinely representative government. He made it clear that it was his intention to increase the elective element in the Legislative Council as time went on and more experience was gained by Nigerian leaders.

What brought about this change of attitude on the part of Sir Hugh Clifford? Was it the agitation of the NCBWA, or should it be traced to another source?

Schwarz (1968) leaves one with the impression that the NCBWA's agitation was responsible for the decision to adopt the elective principle (see p. 94), but Ezera (p. 27) and Awa (1964) share the credit between Sir Hugh Clifford and the NCBWA; while yet again, Crowder (p. 256) and Coleman, (1986:196) doubt whether the NCBWA should be given any credit as having forced the elective principle. The obvious reason for this last position was the hostile attitude Clifford manifested towards the NCBWA; the failure of the Congress to elicit any substantial support when it sent its delegation to England; the fact that the Gold Coast, where the Council had its headquarters and consequently its stronghold, did not have such a constitutional concession until 1925.

The argument against giving any direct credit to the NCBWA in forcing the 1922 constitutional change is impressive, and when it is backed by the fact that "the principle of election had already been introduced for the Lagos Town Council in 1920, before the NCBWA had produced the Accra resolution" (Crowder, p. 256), it seems unshakeable. Since there is the distinct possibility that after his condemnation of the NCBWA, Sir Hugh Clifford was filled with remorse and conceded the elective principle demanded by the NCBWA, this writer concludes this section by saying this: whether or not the NCBWA succeeded in forcing constitutional change, one is in no position to say – at best, all that one can say is that the question is disputed among experts. One thing is clear however, that is, the NCBWA did not develop in response to constitutionally provided opportunities. Note also that the NCBWA never claimed to be a political party. The only reason it is considered here is that it was a political organization, harbinger to political parties in West Africa, and its modus operandi would be emulated by parties much later.

THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NNDP)

The NCBWA seemed to have foundered after 1920, but political activities continued in each of the British West African Colonies. In Nigeria, the introduction of the elective principle stimulated political activities in the coastal regions, Lagos in particular. With the prospect of four seats in the Legislative Council – three for Lagos and one for Calabar – several political parties were formed, and newspapers were produced to champion their respective causes (see Price, p. 38).

The most notable party at this time was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded by Herbert Macaulay, generally regarded as the "Father of Nigerian Nationalism". The bedrock of the party was the component of Chiefs, imams and market – women leaders. This group which was largely non-literate and included a few wealthy merchants dominated the party executive and controlled the selection of candidates to the legislative council (Sklar 1963:47).

The aim of the NNDP was vaguely stated as the promotion of African freedom. In practice, however, the energies of the party were expended on parochial issues of local politics in Lagos-a factor which proved to be a liability.

The British colonial administration at this time had real problems on their hands, but these were far from Lagos, and had nothing to do with Macaulay or his party. As Crowder (p. 257) writes:

The British administration was certainly not greatly worried by Macaulay's activities, especially as they did really only touch on events in Lagos. As far as they were concerned, their main problems lay outside the restricted arena of Lagos politics, particularly in South-eastern Nigeria where indirect rule was not proving a success.

It is clear, therefore, that the activities of the NNNDP failed to impress or influence British colonial attitudes, and force any constitutional change.

THE PEOPLE'S UNION

The only other political party worth mentioning at this time was *The People's Union*. An organization with this name came into existence, first, in 1908; it continued a precarious existence until becoming defunct in 1916. It is this organization that was revived in response to Clifford's elective principle and the 1922 constitution and contested elections alongside the NNNDP until the late 1920s.

Founded by Dr. J. K. Randle, *The People's Union* did attract a class of potentially radical professional men with progressive ideas; for example, Ernest Ikoli, Nigeria's leading journalist of the time, and later a founder member of the Nigerian Youth Movement (of which more infra), was its last secretary. However, *The People's Union* never posed a serious challenge to the NNNDP (Sklar, p. 48), and was no more than a small irritant to the British colonial administration. The party expired in 1928 shortly after the death of its founder.

THE NIGERIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT (NYM)

The failures and weakness of the NNNDP had one positive result. They encouraged young radicals to form their own party – the Nigerian Youth Movement.

The movement actually developed from the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) formed in 1934 to oppose the colonial administration's educational policy with regard to the Yaba Higher College, which the nationalists thought should have university status (see Crowder, p. 266).

The Movement was formed and led by four persons, Ernest Ikoli, Dr. J. C. Vaughan, Samuel Akinsanya, and H. O. Davies, a group which Sklar and Whitaker in Coleman and Rosberg (eds): 598 described as:

A Self-conscious ethno social elite of Yoruba-speaking heritage, prominently represented in the professional and entrepreneurial spheres of Lagos society.

At first the NYM was restrictive in outlook. But when Nnamdi Azikiwe, editor and publisher of the nationalistic daily newspaper, *WEST AFRICAN PILOT*, joined it, he brought along with him a large following of Ibos, and thus gave the party a broad representation, thus taking it out of the realm of being regarded as no more than a mere Lagos faction (Crowder, p. 266f).

As part of its effort to achieve national unity, the Youth Movement organized branches in key centers throughout Nigeria. As Coleman is at pains to point out, actually, many branches had been formed in Yoruba land as early as 1936; and in 1938 new branches were opened at Ibadan, Ijebu-Ode, Warri, and Benin city in the West; Aba, Enugu, Port Harcourt, and Calabar in the East; and among Southern expatriate groups in Jos, Kaduna, Zaria, and Kano in the north (p. 225).

Odumosu (1963) opines that the NYM was the first effort in the political history of Nigeria to organize a party on modern lines. That was perhaps, he thought, due to some young blood which came to be infused into Nigerian politics from this time on (p. 31). Be that as it may, the principal aim of the party, as contained in its charter, was "the development of a united nation out of the conglomeration of the people who inhabit Nigeria", and the political aim was embodied in the following words:

The goal of our political activities is complete autonomy within the British Empire. We are striving towards a position of equal partnership with other member states of the British Commonwealth of Nations...

(Quoted in Awolowo, 1960: 121; see also Odumosu, p. 30 and Coleman, 1986:225).

Throughout the inter-war period, the movement consistently urged upon the colonial government the need for constitutional reforms in Nigeria (Ezera, 1964:55), and indeed as late as 1946, it was agitating side by side with the NCNC and other groups for the reform of the Richards Constitution (Sklar, p. 59).

The activities of the NYM contributed to the growing awareness, in colonial administration circles, and a recognition that the demands of the educated Africans were important. But though Crowder (p. 270) points out that it remained in the realm of discussion rather than of practical policy, there can be no doubt but that the NYM remained the most influential political party in Nigeria until 1941. In that year the party ceased to exist as a cohesive organization with any pretence at national following. The reason was that the popular nationalist, Nnamdi Azikiwe had resigned from it, carrying with him the support of the non-indigenous (non Lagosian) Yorubas in addition to the Ibo settlers of Lagos, as Sklar and Whitaker in Coleman and Rosberg (eds) (p. 598f) inform.

From what we can garner from the examination of the NYM, it is clear that – as far as its immediate origin is concerned anyway – it did not develop in response to any constitutionally provided opportunity. On the flip side however, since its demands and agitation were noticed and considered important, added to the fact that, as pointed out earlier, it joined other organizations in urging upon the colonial government the need for constitutional reforms the NYM contributed to forcing the pace of constitutional change in colonial Nigeria.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NIGERIA AND THE CAMEROONS (NCNC) AND THE RICHARDS CONSTITUTION

After the break-up of the NYM, there was a short lull in party activity. It would pick up again in 1944. Acting on the initiative of the Nigerian Union of Students, Nnamdi Azikiwe issued appeals to the various organizations that existed then for cooperation in accelerating political movement. Sklar (p. 57) gives these organizations as professional groups, religious groups, social clubs and women's organizations. Coleman's treatment of the organizational membership of the NCNC is more detailed; the interested reader can do no worse than recourse to **Nigeria: Background to Nationalism**, p. 264f. The appeal was directed even to

the NYM which was at that time trying rather unsuccessfully to reorganize. Though most of the other organizations responded, the NYM flatly rejected the overtures. Ostensibly, the NYM was still smarting over the role played by Nnamdi Azikiwe in the break-up of 1941, but also as Awa (p. 98) points out, "the members of the NYM did not believe that he (Azikiwe) was willing to work on a collegial basis with his intellectual equals".

Undaunted by the rebuff from the NYM, and aided by the climate created by the Second World War and the current of ideas in Lagos, in the words of Crowder (p. 272), "opportune for the creation of a nationalist movement", Azikiwe went on to found the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) – which after 1961 became the National Convention of Nigerian citizens when Southern Cameroon, until then administered under trusteeship as part of Nigeria, opted to join La Republique du Cameroun.

Between 1944 and 1957 the NCNC was the leading all-Nigerian nationalist organization whose aims as contained in its constitution were:

- i) To extend democratic principles and to advance the interests of the people.
- ii) To adopt suitable means for the purpose of imparting political education to the people of Nigeria with a view to achieving self-government, and
- iii) To afford the members the advantages of a medium of expression in order to secure political freedom, economic security, social equality and religious toleration in Nigeria and the Cameroons under mandate as a member of the British Commonwealth of free Nations (see The Constitution of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, Lagos: 1945:1)

Almost simultaneous with the formation of the NCNC, the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Arthur Richards submitted constitutional proposals to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The proposals and submission were carried out behind the backs of Nigerian nationalists; it was passed into law after being discussed for a mere 29 minutes in an almost empty House of Commons in Britain. The proposals were eventually embodied in a white paper published simultaneously in London and Nigeria. "It is no exaggeration", writes Ezera (p. 67) about it, "to say that it was the first time Nigerians came to hear about their constitutional future". The reaction of the Nigerian Nationalists was quick and sharp. To quote Ezera again:

On learning of the Richards' constitutional proposals for the first time, the nationalist elements in the country naturally reacted with a storm of abuse and bitter criticism in their newspaper organs (see Ezera, p. 76)

The reason this particular constitution generated so much heat was that:

1. It was drafted and passed as legislation, as indicated above, without consultation with the nationalists, contrary to what Sir Hugh Clifford's predecessor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, had made people believe;
2. The constitution failed to provide democratic representation and responsible government.

Nationalists of all shades, moderates as well as radicals alike, were involved in the bitter expressions of condemnation. But it was the newly-formed NCNC that toured the country in 1946, collected 13, 000 pounds sterling with which it financed a delegation that went to London in 1947 to seek a revision of the constitution.

From the foregoing treatment, it is clear that the NCNC did not owe its formation directly to any constitutionally provided opportunities. On the other hand, though the delegation to London failed in its short-term aims, its visit, in the words of Price (p. 60) "undoubtedly dramatized the existence of a nationalist movement in Nigeria and the discontent of a certain politically important element of the population. "Also when it is considered that right from the word "go" the Governor who replaced Sir Richards attempted a rapprochement with the Nigerian nationalists, it can be argued that the NCNC as a party succeeded in forcing the pace of constitutional change.

MACPHERSON CONSTITUTION AND THE ACTION GROUP (A.G)

The mass popularity enjoyed by the NCNC at its formation soon waned, in particular after the delegation to London returned in disarray. From then on, ethnic tensions developed within the ranks of the party with the Yorubas feeling threatened with Ibo domination (Jordan, p. 142). To counter said threat, real or imagined, many Yorubas turned instead to the EGBE OMO ODUDUWA, a Yoruba cultural group founded and led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

Meanwhile, a new Governor, in the person of Sir John McPherson took over from Sir Arthur Richards in April 1948. As indicated earlier, he initiated a rapprochement with the nationalists as soon as he took office. In his inaugural address to the Legislative Council, McPherson stated inter alia:

Since my arrival in the country I have had time to see something of the constitutional system in practice... The progress already made has been in my considered view, so rapid and so sound that ... I propose that if it is the wish of the country constitutional changes should be made not at the end of nine years but in the second three-year period which will start in 1950.

(Address by His Excellency the Governor to the Legislative Council, 17 August 1948, p. 8f, quoted in Ezera, p. 87).

The allusion to nine years in the quotation refers to the term Sir Arthur Richards laid down for the **Richards Constitution** to be in operation before review. It was the wish of the country that constitutional changes be made as soon as possible. Accordingly, a General conference for the review of the constitution was summoned to meet in Ibadan in January 1950. The basic outline of the new constitution with its extension of the elective principle to be introduced in 1951 was widely known already and was being discussed. About this Sklar (p. 101) writes:

By 1950 the basic outline of the new constitution to be introduced in 1951 was already known, and the anti-Azikiwe group among the Yoruba elite contemplated the depressing likelihood that an NCNC government would come to power in the Western Region. Their old party, the NYM, was an effective instrument in Lagos only, where it could not match the electoral strength of the NNDP, an NCNC affiliate. The logical nucleus of a new political opposition to the NCNC was the pan-Yoruba cultural Organization, Egbe Omo Oduduwa, which did engage in limited political activities through a political committee on constitutional reform.

Awolowo himself writing in his autobiography, **Awo, The Autobiography of Chief Awolowo**, (1960) gives the impression that he had his own ideas about how the country should be run and the sort of people to run it now that the Macpherson constitutional proposals was going to allow more participation and control to Nigerians. He writes that having examined all the existing parties and organizations, including the NCNC and Egbe Omo Oduduwa, he found them wanting. As a consequence he came to the conclusion that a new party must be formed (Awo: Autobiography, p. 218). To this task Awolowo set himself. Using the Egbe as a base, aided by a small group of Yoruba intellectuals, and with the full support of Yoruba Obas, Awolowo planned the new party in secret so that as he himself claims with some pride: "The announcement in Nigerian newspapers on the 21 March 1951 of the birth of the Action Group took the country by storm" (p.213).

The aims of the Action Group included the following:

- 1) To encourage and strengthen most sedulously all the ethnical organizations in the Western Region; and
- 2) To explore all possibilities for and to co-operate whole-heartedly with the other nationalists in the formation of a Nigeria-wide organization which shall work as a united team towards the realization of immediate self-government for Nigeria, (see Coleman, 1986:350; also Odumosu, p. 66).

And indeed, the Action Group set out to fight especially for this last, the immediate termination of British rule. Note that it was an AG member of the central legislature who tabled a private member's motion on 1 April, 1953 calling for self-government for Nigeria in 1956. That motion precipitated the "Self-Government-in-1956 motion" crisis that led to the breakdown of the Macpherson Constitution.

To conclude the treatment of the A.G, it can be said without fear of contradiction that the Action Group owed its formation to the opportunities provided by the Macpherson Constitution. And though it was by this time official British policy to guide Nigeria towards independence, the A.G., helped to force the pace of constitutional change, especially the review of the said Macpherson Constitution.

EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE NORTH PRELUDE

And now the treatment of the subject moves on to the North. Political party activity came late to the Northern parts of Nigeria-the former Northern Nigeria to be precise. This can be attributed, by and large, to two inter-related reasons: the desire of the northern traditional ruling class to maintain its hegemony, on the one hand, and a thoroughgoing application of indirect rule on the other. The highly stratified authoritarian political structure of the Hausa states was buttressed by their rulers' use of certain interpretations of Islam designed to inculcate habits and attitudes of subordination which made no allowance for activities such as would be normal in a political party situation. On the flip side was the thoroughgoing application of indirect rule. The success of this policy had the effect of retarding the growth of the party system in Northern Nigeria. This retardation is to be thought of not only in negative terms such as is suggested, but also more positively, in the British colonial administration's overt acts geared to ensure that parties did not emerge in the North. And so, as Coleman (1986:353) rightly points out, there were few overt manifestations of modern nationalist activity or sentiments among the people of the Northern region before the late 1940s. But it could not go on like this forever.

Coleman (1986, chapter 5) has drawn attention to the relevance of education for the development of nationalist feeling, and thus, for the emergence of political parties. In 1939, some youths came together to form the "College Old boy's Association" they were all graduates of Katsina College, one of the Schools established by the British primarily for the purpose of educating the traditional ruling class of the emirates.

Was the formation of the Association spontaneous, or was it influenced by events in the south of the country? Coleman (1986:360 and 363) attributes it to influence of southern provenance. In his own words:

Southern nationalists have stirred the north out of its lethargy. The awakening has been largely a reaction to southern prodding, and not the result of a spontaneous self-generated northern consciousness.

Be that as it may, the aims of the Association were:

- 1) "To ooze out imperialism,
- 2) To break down the idea of sole native authority, and
- 3) To prevent domination by Southerners"

(Nuhu Bamali's words, quoted in Whitaker, 1970:356. Bamali was the Secretary General of the Organization).

In 1939, however, the situation in the North was not favourable to the emergence of political parties. First of all, the elective principle had not been introduced. Secondly, the Northern provinces were not yet represented in the "Nigerian" Legislative Council – all because of the authoritarian political tradition of the Hausa-Fulani emirates, which had been deliberately preserved by the colonial

administration in keeping with the doctrine that African political development should proceed, *sui generis*, from indigenous tradition. And so faced by hostility from both the colonial administration as well as the Native Administration under the control of the emirs, the Association ceased to exist two years after its inauguration. The first blow in the agitation for change in the northern provinces had been thrown, however. Though parried by the authorities, things would never be the same again.

In 1946 nationalists at Kano formed the first non-localized Northern political society called the Northern Elements Progressive Association (NEPA). During the four years of its existence (c. 1946-1949), the NEPA programme emphasized political reform, economic development, and educational opportunity for promising Northern students (Sklar, p. 89f). NEPA was destroyed because of its open political activities. This was done by the discharge and transfer of its principal leaders from their positions in Government and N.A. services (Sklar, p. 92f).

After this, quasi-political groups came and went, as they became too radical for the comfort of the colonial masters and their henchmen, the emirs. Examples were the Zaria Friendly Society, which was disbanded because its founder, Saidu Zungur used its platform to attack the system of native administration; and the same fate overtook the Bauchi Discussion Circle when the salaries of the British Resident and the emir were discussed in the presence of both (Whitaker 356).

By 1948 however, as Dudley (1968:22) points out, "it was acknowledged that the pace of political advance in Nigeria had made the 'Richards Constitution' outdated". With particular reference to Northern Nigeria the same author (p. 79) points out that "the imminence of constitutional changes already promised by Sir John Macpherson made the institution of some region-wide organization seem imperative". This much was realized in particular by the educated and consciously enlightened.

The first tentative steps to form a political organization after the Second World War were taken in September 1948. Dr. R. A. B. Dikko and Mallam D. A. Rafih, acting independently, and unaware of each other's existence and intentions, summoned meetings of their people to discuss the forthcoming changes in the political structure of Nigeria. The two separate groups so organized were the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (Northern People's Congress) in Zaria, and the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa a Yau (The Society of Northern Peoples of Today). According to Jordan (p. 125), these societies were started up by young graduates from Kaduna College in 1948. They were civil servants and junior officials in the native administration, who resented Southerners taking the initiative all the time in social reform movements. Be that as it may, a meeting of both groups led to a merger in October 1948, with the name Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA). And to emphasize its 'Northern' outlook, it was decided at the inaugural meeting that the Hausa title of the organization was to be retained and not translated into English.

This new organization branded itself a socio-cultural organization, according to Sklar and Whitaker (p. 606), "a guise it was considered prudent to adopt because nearly all its members were government or native authority employees for whom political activity was proscribed or discouraged".

At its first general meeting held in Kano in 1949, the more radical Kano contingent wanted the JMA declared a political party. This suggestion did not meet with the approval of the other contingents. The refusal seemed unnecessarily cautious to the Kano contingent, and on 5 August 1950, they organized the first declared political party in the North, called the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). "The party's ostensible purpose," according to Sklar (p. 95), "was to operate as a political vanguard within the broader but more conservative NPC". And so NEPU members still regarded themselves as members of the JMA.

At the second convention held in Jos in December 1950, NEPU presented resolutions urging the convention to declare the JMA an explicitly nationalist political party, according to Dudley (p. 80), "the intention being to use such a party as a platform to contest the forthcoming elections under the proposed constitution". Unable to achieve the desired declaration, NEPU decided to go its way, entering practical party politics in April 1951.

In its Declaration of Principles, issued before the elections of October, 1952, NEPU, Coleman, (1986:364f) tells us, made a frontal assault upon the emirs and the native authority system, alleging that "the shocking state of social order as at present existing in Northern Nigeria is due to nothing but the family compact rule of the so-called native Administrations in their present autocratic form". Arguing that "all political parties are but the expression of class interests", and that there was a class struggle between the members of the "vicious circle of Native Administration" on the one hand, and the ordinary Talakawa on the other, the NEPU leaders declared that the Talakawa must "organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of Government".

The success of NEPU in the regional "primaries" in September 1951, induced the Native Administration Authorities and Regional [colonial] Administration Authorities, to reconsider their stand. On the role of the British administrative officers, Dudley (p. 84) informs that "having initially attempted to check the development of parties, as the example of NEPA and JMA illustrate, with the formation of NEPU, they now turned to view the JMA as the lesser evil. Fearing the radical NEPU might capture control of the Northern House of Assembly, it was decided to convert the NPC into a political party as a progressive, but moderate counterweight to NEPU (Sklar and Whitaker in Coleman and Rosberg (eds), p. 607f). Through a process of graft and patronage the NPC gradually spread its network, and eventually became the predominant party in the Northern Region. This it did in various ways; for example:

- 1) The identification of the party with the whole administrative framework of the Native Administration. Officials of the Native Administration did not

hesitate to bring the whole machinery of the Native Administration behind the party.

- 2) Victimization of members of other parties. For instance, in October 1952, eight known members of NEPU were each jailed for six months by the Alkali (Native judge) of Giwa (Zaria) for summoning and attending political meeting allegedly in contravention of the Zaria NA (Control of Processions and Assemblies) Rules, 1949. But the Chief crime of the eight seemed to be that "the men were no longer respectful" (Dudley, p. 83).
- 3) Appeal to the personality of the Sardauna and the bonds of Islam. The identification of the party and its leaders with the religion of Islam such as to suggest that the party represents the consensus of the society, and not to accept the consensus of society is to be heretical (Dudley, p. 143).

From the treatment of the subject vis-à-vis Northern Nigeria, it is quite clear that NEPU did not come into existence directly as a result of constitutionally provided opportunities. Originally, it was not even concerned with issues of self-rule or political progress as seen in the south. On the contrary, its main focus was reforms in the Native Administrative set-up and welfare services for the Talakawa, the commoner. That was its first phase when it operated as a political vanguard within the broader conservative NPC. But in its second phase when it severed itself from the NPC umbilical chord, it can be said that it came into existence as a result of the opportunity provided by the Macpherson Constitution. As for the resurrected NPC, it is quite clear that it came into existence as a result of constitutionally provided opportunities-those of the Macpherson Constitution of 1951-when it emerged to contest the election under the said constitution.

CONCLUSION

The various authors reviewed at the beginning of this paper point to the fact that the party system, in the words of Brogan, is a 20th century mechanism designed to bring 'The People', the new mass voters into the political community; and Duverger, Dowse and Hughes, as well as Slann have variously attributed the evolution of the party system to the expansion/extension of popular suffrage. Duverger (1978) notes, the more the right to vote is extended and multiplied, the more necessary it becomes to organize the electors by means of committees capable of making candidates known and canalizing the votes in their direction (see p. xxiv). All these apply, mutatis mutandis, to the evolution of the party system in Nigeria. Note also that most of the authors reviewed point out that parties emerged out of pre-existing groups and associations such as Trade Unions, philosophical societies, student associations, Freemasons, Churches and religions sects, Ex-service men's associations, Leagues, Secret societies, etc. Again all these apply to Nigeria as "political parties historically sprang out of self-improvement organization, literary societies and tribal [ethnic] associations of one kind or another". Also Dowse and Hughes' crises of legitimacy and participation (p. 341ff) are very relevant here in the explanation of the evolution of the party system in Nigeria where the party system evolved to challenge the colonial administration, and political leaders resorted to the use of political parties and the media to mobilize millions of Nigerians against the continuation of British rule.

It is safe, therefore, to hold that essentially the same forces and ideas that produced political parties in Europe and the U.S.A were, *mutatis mutandis*, present in early twentieth century Nigeria-which is not surprising really since the phenomenon entered, African political systems as a result of European influence (Jordan, p. 105). But with particular reference to Nigeria, from a reading of the explication of the subject as done in this paper, one cannot help but agree with Coleman (1955) who, recall, averred that the really decisive factor-the precipitant-in the formation of political parties has been constitutional reform providing for, on the one hand, the devolution by the imperial government of a sufficiently meaningful and attractive measure of power to induce or provoke nationalist leaders to convert their movement into political parties; and on the other, the introduction of refinements of institutions and procedures, such as electoral system, which would make it technically possible for parties to seek power constitutionally. The bottom line: Early Nigerian political parties by and large, developed from constitutionally provided opportunities; just as much as they hastened the pace of constitutional change in colonial Nigeria.

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