

## CHAPTER TWO

### RECONSTRUCTING THE ZIKIST MOVEMENT, 1945-1950

#### Introduction

Historically, the infiltration of communist ideology into colonial Africa colonies passed through four stages, each marked by distinctive tactics and goals: First came the propaganda stage when communist literature poured into the country; second, infiltration into labour organisations; third, infiltration into the armed forces; and fourth, a "peace offensive" aimed at the violent overthrow of a government.<sup>1</sup> British analyses, as in the 1950 official document "A Survey of Communism in Africa," gave a vivid outline of this process and identified Soviet satellites in Europe as the source of the infiltration. British officials were concerned about the activities of "national liberation movements" such as the "*Rassemblement Democratique Africain*" (RDA) in North and West Africa,

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1. FO371/80125/1017/4: "Note on the Aims, Strategy and Procedure of the Communists in Africa," May 1, 1950, PRO, London; "AMCONGEN, Lagos, to Secretary of State: Communism in Nigeria, 1949," File 848L.00B/9-2849, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park (NARA), Maryland, USA; PSF Box 254-64: "Soviet Bloc Capabilities through mid-1953," Harry S. Truman Library (HTL), Independence, Missouri; TT Hammonds, and R Farrell, (eds.) *The Anatomy of Communist Take-overs* (New Haven, 1975).

particularly in the French sector. The Communist Party of South Africa was identified as a potential front in sub-Saharan Africa, especially dangerous to colonial rule if communist activists could exploit racial strife to garner supporters in Kenya and the Rhodesias. Other concerns included 1948 Russian case against colonial powers at the United Nations; the growing influence of Communists in Algeria (on the rise until 1955, when the group was outlawed); Soviet and Chinese aid to neighbouring Morocco and Tunisia; and the influence of the French *Confederation General du Travail in North Africa*.<sup>2</sup>

#### **A West African Focus**

Of even greater significance were the activities of the communists in neighbouring West Africa colonies. It was in French-speaking West Africa that the French Communist Party made its greatest impact in the immediate post-war years. Their efforts bore fruit in the formation of *Group d'Etudes Communistes* in 1943 in Abidjan, Bamako,

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2. See, M Halpern, "The Middle East and North Africa," pp 319-320; Lewis, W.H. "sub-Saharan Africa," pp 370-371, in CE Black, and TP Thornton, (eds.) *Communism and Revolution*. CO 537/4731: Communism in West Africa – memorandum by RES Yeldham, March 16, 1949.

Bobo-Dioulasso, Canokry and Dakar. These Marxists groups organised ideological and training classes for members. It was this group of Africans that formed the *Rassemblement Democratique Africain* (RDA) in 1946 (radical in its orientation at least until after 1955) when member groups known to be allied with radical movements, such as the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) were expelled. Under Felix Houphouet-Boigny (later a renegade from the organisation) and Gabriel 'Arbroussier, the RDA aligned with the French Communist Party in Paris at least until 1950.<sup>3</sup> And in French Cameroun, the French were faced with militant activities of the communist-influenced, *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC).<sup>4</sup>

Above all, British officials were also concerned about the *Communist Party of Great Britain's* (CPGB) commitment to encourage and support the formation of a nation-wide Marxist party in British colonies, the possibility of Kremlin exploitation of local discontents, and the

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3. WH Lewis, *sub-Saharan Africa*, p 372.

4. Ibid, p 383; R Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroon: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (London, 1973).

long-term aim of the Cominform in gaining some influence.<sup>5</sup>

Studies on nationalism and decolonisation in Nigeria have understated the seriousness with which post-World War II British officials viewed growing communist tendencies of a few eloquent nationalists.<sup>6</sup> In fact, colonial administrators had tracked leftist infiltration throughout the interwar era, when young Nigerians were so clearly enamoured by communists such as I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and George Padmore, and pan-Africanists such as Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Ladipo Solanke, and anti-colonialists such as Gandhi and Nehru in India.<sup>7</sup> In these earlier decades, British colonial officials

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5. CO537/5263: A Survey of Communism in Africa 1950, PRO, London, pp 3-60.

6. "Amcongen, Lagos, to D.O.S.: Communist activity in Nigeria - File 745H.001/1-656, NARA, College Park, Maryland, p 1. The British TUC was also of the same view. See Mss292/File 966.3/2: W.F.T.U. activities in Nigeria n.d. (probably late 1950), TUC Registry Files 1948-51, Modern Record Centre, The University of Warwick, Warwick, England.

7. JS Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1958); FU Anyiam, *Men and Matters in Nigerian Politics, 1934-1958* (Lagos, 1958); R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, 1963); GO Olusanya, "The Zikist Movement: A Study in Political Radicalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.4, 1966; *The Second World War*, pp 36-37, 116; O Aluko, "Politics of Decolonisation in British West Africa, 1945-1960," in JFA Ajayi, and M Crowder, (eds.) *History of West Africa, vol. II*, (London, 1974); A Osita, "A call for revolution and the forgotten heroes: The story of the Zikist revolution of 1948," *Journal of the Association of Francophone Studies*, vol.1, no.1, 1990.

noted with alarm the activities of organisations such as the *Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)*, the *International Union of Students (IUS)*, *World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)*, the *Women International Democratic Federation (IDF)*, and the *World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY)*.

While leftist groups drew fine distinctions amongst themselves, to Britain's colonial administrators the landscape of the interwar era was defined by mounting radicalisation, as moderate groups lost legitimacy among young Nigerians. Young nationalists and labour unionists grew critical of the seeming inefficacy of associations such as the *National Congress of British West Africa (1920)*; *Nigeria National Democratic Party (1922)*; the *West African Students Union (1925)*; and the *Nigerian Youth Movement (1934)*. They were also dissatisfied with British handling of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis (1935); West Indian colonial problems (1935-1938); and the "deep problems of increasing unemployment in urban areas, poverty, social disruptions caused by colonial changes and increasing urbanisation, ethnic rivalries, and inadequate schools, as well as the fact that development was in general too slow to meet

the aspirations of a population that was becoming better informed."<sup>8</sup>

Immersion in Marxist literature and contacts with the Communist International encouraged radical leftist views; at the same time, British intransigence and these escalating social disruptions convinced activists that militancy was the only meaningful avenue to independence. A few Nigerian youths were also sympathetic to the plight of the Soviets, particularly after the German invasion. Coleman noted that: "earlier in about 1943, Nigerian youths formed the Red Army Club in solidarity with Soviet Russia after the German attack."<sup>9</sup> During the same month "they sent a cable to leaders of Soviet Russia espousing the willingness to establish relations with the youths of Soviet Russia."<sup>10</sup>

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8. G Padmore, *Communism or Pan-Africanism?*; A Ajala, *Pan-Africanism: Evolution*; PO Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement*; L Spitzer and L Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League,' *Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 6, nos.3-4, 1973; SKB Asante, *Pan-African Protests: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941* (London, 1977); GO Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925-1958* (Ibadan, 1982); H Adi, and M Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London, 1995); R Okonkwo, *Protest Movements in Lagos, 1908-1930* (New York, 1995).

9. JS Coleman, *Nigeria*, p 249.

10. Ibid.

Despite superficial similarities between the two processes, Nigeria was an exception to this pattern of leftist in-roads into pseudo-capitalist or colonial societies. Only after World War II did Marxist nationalists and labour unionists emerge as a distinct and powerful voice; still, the number of Communist activists never reached the necessary critical mass and was weakened by sectarianism and generational differences. Many younger Nigerians were looking to Nnamdi Azikiwe to lead the struggle against British rule. As events later showed, though, neither Azikiwe, nor any of the older generation, was prepared for a decolonisation as a path to communism.

### **Marxian Ideology and Zikism**

According to Awa, Nnamdi Azikiwe was the pioneer leader of Marxian socialism in Nigeria. In 1943, Azikiwe spelled out his theoretical ideas in two booklets: "Economic Reconstruction of Nigeria," and "Political Blueprint of Nigeria." He asserted, "Marxian philosophy with its dynamic analysis should become the basis of a new economic system in the country." He recommended the reorganisation of the

economic and political systems to usher in socialism, with the proviso that such reorganization should be done through the democratic process.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, however, Azikiwe abandoned socialism for free trade, constitutionalism and moral re-armament. One can speculate three reasons for his change of heart: the assassination story of 1945, his membership of Moral Re-armament Group in 1949 and the reality of the colonial situation.<sup>12</sup> He nonetheless provided the lead in ideological orientation in nationalist politics.

Azikiwe stated that the aftermath of the General Strike of 1945 was "the emergence of ideological movements whose objectives included not only political freedom, but also social equality and economic security."<sup>13</sup> Nigerian youth provided the leadership in "practical" ideological movements. The

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11. N Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism?* (Lagos, 1980).

12. Awa quite agreed with this position. See, EO Awa, "The Place of Ideology in Nigerian Politics," *African Review*, p 369.

13. Pearce has briefly narrated that Azikiwe's visit to College of Good Hope, Caux-sur-Montreux, Switzerland in November 1949, was partly instrumental in his change of heart from violence to "constitutionalism and peaceful means." See his "Governors, Nationalists, and the Constitution in Nigeria, 1935-1951," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.ix, no.3, May 1981, p 304. His view that nationalists did not influence constitutional changes is inaccurate and suspect.

youth were tired of "long articles, plenty of talks and no work" that had become the feature of elite nationalism up to 1945.<sup>14</sup> In fact, with the collapse of the *Nigerian Youth Movement* and the formation of the *National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons* (later, National Council of Nigerian Citizens) in August 1944, some Nigerian youths felt that there was need to start a socialist movement.<sup>15</sup>

Earlier in 1945, Amanke Okafor formed a Marxist group called "Talakawa Party." It did not, however, exist as a political party but as a think-tank group. Its aim was to rally the working class together in order to "achieve a free independent and a socialist Nigeria." This group however made no real impact because its founder/leader soon left Nigeria for further studies in the United Kingdom, where he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain and was

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14. N Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism?* (Lagos, 1980), p 90.

15. Ibid, p 91. One of the leading Marxists of the period, Mokwugo Okoye, notes that: "it was not until the end of the World War II ... that the ideas of the revolution spread like prairie fire and captivated the proletarian masses..." See, M Okoye, *A Letter to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe: A Dissent Remembered* (Enugu, 1979), p 1.

featured in its activities before his return to Nigeria in early 1950s.<sup>16</sup>

On July 8, 1945, the *Nigerian National Socialist Party* was born under the leadership of Fola Arogundade. Other members were A. Chukwura, Babatunde Shotade, G. Menkiti, Mudashiru Dawodu, Shola Morris, S. Okeke, Alli Zazau and Alabi McIver.<sup>17</sup> Its secretariat was located at 9 Ondo Street, Ebute-Metta East, Lagos. This embryonic organisation did not enjoy the support of older nationalists because of its communist orientation.<sup>18</sup> Members regarded capitalism as the cause of Nigerian misery. According to them, "it had encouraged the enactment of inhuman legislation to foster the degeneration of mankind."<sup>19</sup> Despite anti-capitalist rhetoric, the leader of the *NNSP* lamented after its collapse that "its adherents were a very meek and weak lot of young people... We want to practice socialism but we are an ignorant mass of citizens comforted by the maxim that none can

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16. Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria*, p 91.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

learn to swim until one is in the water."<sup>20</sup> The organisation was a non-starter and its immediate collapse was not surprising. Its leader's remark is but a reflection on why many would-be leftist organisations during the colonial era did not long endure.

Between 1946 when the *Zikist Movement* was formed and 1948 when it assumed a militant posture towards the British administration in Nigeria, the stage seemed set for Nigerian Marxists and their sympathisers in the struggle against British colonialism. On February 16, 1946, young radical Nigerians within the *NCNC* formed a movement, which derived its inspiration from Nnamdi Azikiwe himself. Its founding members were Kola Balogun (first President), C.K. Ajuluchukwu (the first secretary-general), Andrew Agams, Abiodun Aloba and Nduka Eze. Other members included Raji Abdallah (second President), Osita Agwuna, K.O. Mbadiwe, Ogedengbe Macaulay, Ikenna Nzimiro, Mokwugo Okoye and Ralph

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20. Ibid.

Aniedobe.<sup>21</sup> It should be stressed here that contrary to official perception that the Zikist Movement was full of "irresponsible young men,"<sup>22</sup> the formation of the Movement was due to their growing impatience with what they considered to be the slow pace of Nigeria's political advancement during the period.<sup>23</sup>

The Zikist Movement was formed in order to espouse and perpetuate Zikism as a resplendent universal philosophy. At its formation local colonial reality was the dictating factor rather than international idealism. Leftist ideology was however the philosophical energiser in their struggle against the anachronistic British rules. Hence they did not rule out violence against the British in Nigeria. This view however was soon overwhelmed (as will be shown later) by pacifism - a philosophy that recognises compromise.

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21. Ibid, pp 91-92. Nduka Eze, "A Discourse on Violence and Pacifism as Instruments of Struggle for Freedom," *West African Pilot*, May 13, 1950. Thanks to my friend Dr. Phillip Zachernuk (Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada) for making a copy available to me.

22. The organisation was formed in 1946 without the participation of Azikiwe himself. See, CO537/7171: The Zikist Movement, 1950; CO537/5807: R.J. Vile to J.K. Thompson, April 27, 1950, PRO, London.

23. CO537/7171: "The Zikist Movement."

By October 1948, Osita Agwuna had made his "A Call for Revolution," where he called for a peace offensive against the British administration in Nigeria. In February 1949, Ogedengbe Macaulay talked of "dragging of the government down, and seizing power by force."<sup>24</sup> During the same month, Raji Abdallah implored his northern brethren to join in the violent struggle.<sup>25</sup> He also called for "positive action to end British rule" (this phrase was later used by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) of the Gold Coast).<sup>26</sup> Although government clamped down on them by arresting and charging ten of them with sedition in 1949,<sup>27</sup> this did not deter other members from inciting other uprisings in other parts of the country.

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24. CO537/3694: "Political Summary of Nigeria, 1950," PRO, London.

25. Ibid. In fact, the government accused the Zikists for the escalation of the Enugu colliery miners' strike in November 1949. The Fitzgerald Commission's Report however remarked that the incident was purely an industrial issue between the management of the colliery and the miners. To them, there was no trace of external influence. See, *Report of the Commission into the Disorders in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria*, no.256, (HMSO: London, 1950).

26. See, Raji Abdallah's letter to the Zikists and his northern brethren in *West African Pilot*, February 25, 1949; CO537/3649: Nigeria - Political Summary October -November, 1948, PRO, pp 4-5.

27. Ibid. See chapters three and four in this study for further accounts of Zikists activities.

Azikiwe used the N.C.N.C Convention of April 1949 in Lagos to call for moderation and discipline among his followers, particularly the Zikists. He denounced militancy and revolution and called on all militant elements to ponder deeply the reasonableness and viability of a positive action without a mobilised force, a disciplined army, a well-protected general staff, a line of communication, and lastly a cause worth fighting and dying for.

This view generated many comments from Zikist leadership. On April 6, 1949, a commentary published in *African Echo* denounced Azikiwe's view as "a disappointing and distracting declaration." The commentary concluded that, "For our part, we wonder where Zik will get any army to mobilise when the time comes. Certainly, not those disappointed and disillusioned disciples of Zikism would again freely offer their services."<sup>28</sup>

On February 16, 1950, the colonial police Special Branch uncovered Zikist sabotage plan after several raids that cut across the nation. In the Northern Provinces, fifteen persons' houses were

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28. *African Echo*, April 6, 1949. CO 537/4727: Nigeria political summary, May 1949.

searched and seditious documents were found in eleven of them. They were all prosecuted and found guilty by the colonial magistrate courts. In the Eastern provinces, seven houses were searched and two persons in Onitsha and Enugu were arrested and charged for like offences. The search and arrest of Ikenna Nzimiro's house at Onitsha (he was the secretary of the Onitsha Branch of the Movement) drew much excitement. The document entitled "The National Programme" was found in the house of Nzimiro at Onitsha. The document was in code, the key to which was also found. The document and code was for the use of Zikist Movement members, the N.N.F.L. and the U.A.C. Amalgamated Workers Union, the three bodies with which Nduka Eze was intimately associated. Other documents found included plans to destroy oil storage centres and essential government houses. During the prosecution, Nzimiro confirmed receiving the messages in his mailbox on February 7, 1950, and was awaiting further instructions before the police search. He was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to nine months in prison.<sup>29</sup>

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29. *Daily Mirror*, March 8, 1950. CO 537/5801: Sir James Macpherson to Mr. Griffiths on the arrests of Zikist members, March 25, 1950, PRO. I Nzimiro, *On Being a Marxist* is an

The height of Zikist activities was an abortive attempt on the life of Chief Secretary Hugh Foot in early 1950.<sup>30</sup> On February 18, 1950, *Reuters* reported that a young Ibo man named Heelas Chukwuma Ugokwe, of the Posts and Telegraph Department, attacked Foot with a knife when the Chief Secretary was entering the Secretariat building in Lagos. Two days later, Ugokwe was charged with attempted murder; on March 13, 1950, Mr. Justice Rhodes at the Lagos Magistrate Court sentenced Ugokwe to life imprisonment.<sup>31</sup>

In his report to the Secretary of State, Governor Macpherson laid full blame for the assassination plan on the Zikist Movement, noting that Ugokwe, a World War II veteran, had joined the Zikist Movement at its inception in 1946.<sup>32</sup> He, along with eleven other youths, was allegedly specifically recruited as an "assassin" during the Zikist Movement convention at Kaduna in December of

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in-depth account of his role during the period. An analysis of newspaper reports of the sedition trial is contained in EEG Iweriebor, *Radical Politics in Nigeria*, pp 171-209.

30. CO537/5807: R.J. Vile to J.K. Thompson, April 27th 1950, PRO, London.

31. CO583/302/13: Macpherson to Secretary of State for colonies, February 25, 1950, PRO, London.

32. *Daily Times*, March 14, 1950.

1949 to carry out a nation-wide plot aimed at the forcible seizure of power from the government.<sup>33</sup> It was further claimed that Mokwugo Okoye personally issued instructions for this assignment.<sup>34</sup> Initially, Ugokwe's target was Macpherson himself, but after waiting nine days without finding an opportunity to kill the Governor (Secretary of State for colonies); he shifted his sights to the Chief Secretary. Fellow Zikists and their sympathisers applauded Ugokwe's action. Ndolue, on behalf of others, directed an appeal to the West African Court of Appeal, which reduced Ugokwe's life sentence to a twelve-year prison term.<sup>35</sup>

This incident predictably led to a tightening of security within official circles, and the eventual banning of the movement under the "Unlawful Societies Act, April 1950." A public notice in mid-April, 1950, declared that "conclusive evidence has been

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33. CO583/302/13: Macpherson to Secretary of State.

34. Ibid. Iweriebor has used newspaper reports to narrate events during the Kaduna conference. See *Radical Politics*, pp 231-235. He is however silent about the recruitment of some members as "assassins" to carry out the 1950 plot, neither is he aware about Okoye's appointment as the leader of the group. For details see HI Tijani, "Communists and the Nationalist Movement," T Falola, (ed.) *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, 2002).

35. *Daily Telegraph* (London), July 21, 1950.

obtained from many parts of the country that the Zikist Movement is an organisation, which aims to stir up hatred and malice and to pursue seditious aims, by lawlessness and violence."<sup>36</sup> The government also confiscated "all banners, insignia arms, papers, books, documents and any similar property" of the organization.<sup>37</sup>

### **Zikism as Anti-Colonial Leftism**

The philosophy of the Zikist Movement was largely nationalistic with a strong admixture of Communist Party terminology, the adoption of a Marxist philosophy and a complete opposition to colonial government in any form. The Movement was revolutionary and considered the colonial tutelage an anathema to the development of the people of Nigeria.

Although the Zikist Movement was banned in April of 1950, this did not extirpate it entirely. It survived through a re-grouping of interests and tactics. This tactical shift was two fold. First, the

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36. Government Notices No. 21, Volume 37, April 13th, 1950. See, M Okoye, *A Letter to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe*, p 30.

37. NSUDIV8/1/305: Why Government Banned the Zikist Movement, April 29, 1950, National Archives Enugu (NAE), Nigeria; Government Notices nos.21, vol.37, April 1950, Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos, Nigeria.

older generation was eliminated as active participants and leaders in the Movement, in large part because Azikiwe and others in his cohort abandoned the Zikists' course. With the generational shift, reformism and military action now took second seat behind an organizational putsch that "aimed to manoeuvre their opponents (Nigerians and British) in debates, elections and practical work." As Okoye succinctly puts it: "The point here is to beat the opponent at his own game by demonstrating a superior intellect, energy and patriotism, thus throwing doubt in the enemy's mind as to the value of his ideals or lack of them while at the same time showing that the methods and aims of the revolutionary group are preferable to any other." This "organisational putschism is to be distinguished from sheer reformism or Fabianism which is essentially a doctrine of middle class complacency and only thrives where national prosperity is high and there are no sharp distinctions between classes." Various branches of the Zikist Movement tabled resolutions counselling violence to members. An extract from one by the Onitsha branch being typical of the whole:

1. Gymnastic exercises - All Branch Committees shall learn: Forest escapades and studies; Fasting in the Campings; Swimming; Military Tactics.

2. Arrests of Members - On the pronouncement of sentences: The magistrate or Judge shall be dealt with; The Incendiary explosive shall be laid if possible under the seat of the Judge or magistrate around the courts".<sup>38</sup>

Second, the flow of communist literature into the country through the CPGB in London grew in volume, reaching Zikists and other communist or socialist followers. To illustrate, in November of 1950, out of a total of seventy sacks of second-class mail, six were taken at random and examined; in each sack examined, there were 1,000 communist pamphlets, and it was estimated that 50,000 pamphlets must have entered Nigeria by one mail boat alone.<sup>39</sup> In the

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38. Ibid. Also, CO 537/4727: Nigeria political summary on tensions in the Zikist movement and increasing influence of NYM, May 1949, PRO. OYO Prof. 1/4957: Secretary Western Province to the Resident, Oyo province - "Zikist Movement in Nigeria 1950" *Extraordinary Gazette*, no.13, April 1950, NAI. Attempts to eulogise and propagate this idea were made through newspaper article by Nduka Eze. In May 13, 1950 he published "A discourse on violence and pacifism as instruments of the struggle for freedom" in *Labour Champion*. He justified violence as the best recipe for the overthrow of British rule in Nigeria.

39. See, M Okoye, *A Letter to Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe*, p 56. The infiltration of the bourgeoisie group was one of the steps taken by the Marxists in Nigeria to make themselves relevant in colonial politics. This perhaps explains why they returned to the major political parties in 1954/55 in order to renew their struggle. See, HI Tijani, "McCarthyism in Colonial Nigeria:

latter half of 1952 and the beginning of 1953, the volume perceptibility increased and at the same time there was a change in emphasis. Earlier types of propaganda were Marxist books, propaganda acclaiming the Russian way of life and Stalin's virtues. These types were quickly overtaken by Cold War propaganda, anti-colonial propaganda, and newspapers and periodicals critiques. There were an increased number of pamphlets sent to private addresses despite the fact that the people could not pay for them.<sup>40</sup>

While the Zikist motto was "secrecy and ruthless execution of our plans,"<sup>41</sup> the movement confusingly vacillated between pro- and anti-British statements, responding in large part to anti-leftist British colonial initiatives. After 1950, the leftist orientation was much clearer, and membership of the organization was insistently

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The Ban on the Employment of Communists," A Oyebade, (ed.) *The Foundations of Nigeria* (Trenton, 2003), pp 661-663.

40. CO968/353: Benion to Shaw and Hujisman, November 1950, PRO, London.

41. DEFE82/51: Undesirable Publication Policy, June 10, 1953. For instance, in 1953 Samuel Ikoku was arrested and jailed for being in possession of *Nigerian Socialist Review* See H Adi, "West African" p 256; "AMCONGEN, Lagos to Department of State: Communism in Nigeria Today," File747H.0018-1453, August 14, 1953, NARA, College Park, Maryland, p 4.

42. NSUDIV8/1/305: "Why Government Banned the Zikist Movement,"

coloured by Marxian teachings.<sup>42</sup> Zikism invoked a vague vision of African irredentism, an idea drawn from Azikiwe's *Renasant Africa* (1937).

The Movement had nine goals, spelled out thus:

- (1) "To study painstakingly and objectively, practice conscientiously, seriously and constitutionally the creed of "Zikism" as set out by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in his *Renasant Africa* and allied teachings and as propounded in its philosophical form by Nwafor Orizu;"
  - (2) "To faithfully follow the leadership of Dr. Azikiwe;"
  - (3) "To courageously and intelligently preach Zikism, making it understandable to the mass of the indigenous elements of the country with the purpose of aiding the evolution of a united nation out of the varied tribes of Nigeria and the British Cameroons;"
  - (4) "To faithfully dedicate our lives to the task of African Redemption by concretely demonstrating and defending even at the risk of paying the supreme sacrifice, the Zikist way of life;"
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(5)"To use every available means of submitting constitutionally the opinions, feelings, sentiments and customs of the people of the country to the British Government of Nigeria;"

(6)"To take interest in all activities, events, happenings and practices that affects the destiny of this country' "

(7)"To co-operate with other organisations in the country whose aims and aspirations do not clash with those of this movement;"

(8)"To co-operate with the Zikist Movement the world over;" and,

(9)"To raise funds from Zikists and the general public in furtherance of these objects."<sup>43</sup>

In fact, British and American officials were justifiably apprehensive about the implications of these tenets. The Marxian vision inspiring the creed was suggested in a Zikist-sponsored editorial on September 3, 1946, in *Nigerian Spokesman*, castigating the Police Force, the Army, and lawyers. As to the last, for example, the editorial declared that: "a

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43. "AMCONGEN, Lagos to Department of State: Zikist Movement," File 848L.00/7-1047, July 10, 1947, College Park, Maryland.

lawyer becomes a societal flower and even an anachronism in the United Nigeria Republic since his profession is based on laws enacted by the former (colonial) rulers." The editorial continued, "The Army and the Police Force would have to be disbanded and reformed because they are co-operative part of what socialists recognise as the state machine."<sup>44</sup>

Apart from sponsored editorials in *African Echo*, *Nigerian Spokesman*, *Daily Comet* and the *West African Pilot* (before 1949), the Zikists aired their agenda in the "Zimo Newsletter," the official publication of the organisation. In addition to exegeses on Marxist-Leninist thought and philosophy, topics included, "What is the Zikist Movement?" and "Workers of Nigeria Revolt." The Zikists openly declared their commitment to socialism and explicitly endorsed the Marxist thesis that economic factors conditioned the moral, legal and political aspects in the development of any given society.<sup>45</sup>

This explains why members of the Zikist Movement were variously described as a "Communist

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44. Ibid.

45. *Nigerian Spokesman* Editorial, September 3, 1946.

propagandist," and a "band of youths who advocated the violent overthrow of the British administration." Some of them (i.e. Abdallah and Oged Macaulay) were described as making "violently anti-Government speeches in public," contrary to their employment in the colonial civil service. Osita Agwuna, author of "A Call for Revolution," was described as a man "inclined increasingly towards violence... probably because he aspires to make a martyr of himself."<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps British officials were right to fear for themselves and the colonial regime. As early as October 9, 1948, Agwuna issued a call to 'positive action' at a meeting of the Lagos branch of the NCNC at the Yaba Stadium; he proposed a resolution accusing the government of fanning tribal discord by encouraging "minority elements."<sup>47</sup> He then called upon those present to pledge "to take any measure to silence the 'minority' and to overthrow the Government and handover power to the NCNC."<sup>48</sup> As the

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46. Okoye, M. *A Letter to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe*, pp 14-15.

47. CO537/3649: Nigeria-Political Summary, October-November 1948, PRO, London.

48. *Ibid*, pp 2-3.

report shows, wiser counsels at the meeting prevailed, and the resolution was withdrawn.

However, in late October—just three weeks later—Agwuna followed up with "A Call for Revolution." In that lecture, he identified Nigeria's two principal enemies: the first was the Government itself, and the second was the people's fearful reluctance to rise up and drive out that Government. As far as he was concerned, the only hope of salvation was progressive revolution beginning with a civil disobedience campaign. He then recommended that every taxable Nigerian refuse to pay taxes to the Government but remit an equivalent amount into the *NCNC* coffers. In addition, Empire Day should stop forthwith; nobody should join the civil service or the army; and the *NCNC* on its forthcoming tour should "preach a doctrine of hate and contempt for the Government."<sup>49</sup>

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49. *Ibid*, p 3.

### **Zikism as a Call to Action**

Agwuna's "A Call for Revolution" is worth reproducing in full, as it well illustrates his Marxist foundations and temperament:

#### "A CALL FOR REVOLUTION"

(a) "Like heroes let us show the spirit to dare and conquer; let us forget the momentary interests of our cumbrous flesh and pursue a lasting pearl that is freedom; let us fight for the honour of smashing the present Imperialist State machine BY AS FOUL AND VICIOUS METHODS AS WITH WHICH WE ARE STILL CAPTIVATED; let us for once cast aside that simplicity and complacency which have been a curse to our race and cultivate those wordy virtues which speak, use and understand the language of the World in every changing epoch;"

(b) "Our youth must then assimilate the methods of India, Burma, Indonesia, Lybia (sic) and Palestine, where unwilling Rulers have been shown their way out; MUST DAMN RELIGIOUS AND HUMANIST INHIBITIONS and, where the means is certain of the end, work on the hypothesis that the end justifies the means. MUST EMBRACE ACTIVE REVOLUTION AS THE CURRENT WORLD ORDER, MUST EMBRACE THE SCIENTIFIC USE

OF FORCE for justice without force, it is said, is powerless; and force without justice is tyranny."

(c) "The youths of Africa should interest themselves in Military tactics of defence, in physical adventures of all kinds and should demonstrate more than a passing and academic interest in the methods and tactics of revolutionary movements in other countries and seek communion with them. In particular, they should organise themselves for intensified picketing and boycott. DELIBERATE GROUP VIOLATION OF EVERY LAW and executive order which they deem to be tyrannical and a breach of human right and for various forms of revolutionary activities and should highly resolve to save this continent from the predatory clutches of Imperialism through any mean."<sup>50</sup>

Agwuna's Marxian call to action led to the arrest of the meeting's chairman, Anthony Enahoro, together with Duke Dafe and Ralph Aniedobe, and their prosecution for sedition at the colonial court.

Although the arrests did not occasion much excitement

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50. NSUDIV 8/1/305: Why the Government banned the Zikist Movement, May 29 1950, Appendix 2, NAE, emphasis in original.

initially, some of the ex-servicemen soon came out with attacks on Azikiwe saying that "he put these young men up to making the speech and that if he was the patriot he held himself to be he would have insisted on going to prison with them."<sup>51</sup>

The prosecution of these men notwithstanding, other Zikists continued the struggle. In mid-November of 1948, an unsigned message was issued from the Zikist Movement secretariat in Lagos and distributed throughout the country.

The message read thus:

NATIONALIST MESSAGE LAGOS

"Be it known by all Zikists and freedom-loving Nigerians that this is the hour. The Zikist Movement can no longer hope to have reason where, it is evident, respect for reason does not exist. The movement is therefore calling upon the youths of the country to support it in the present struggle for freedom. We cannot allow this challenge to our manhood to go. The Zikist Movement, in humble obedience to the call, is now ordering all the branches and regional presidents to organise and lead

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51. CO537/3649: Nigeria - Political Summary, p 3.

campaigns throughout the country so as to makes our stand known. Our branches and branch officers should not antagonise any tribal and political groups. The campaign should aim at focusing the attention of the masses towards the one common central danger - the British Government."<sup>52</sup>

While the Azikiwe-led *NCNC* seemed ambivalent, Abdallah and other Zikists opted to identify themselves completely with Agwuna on the need for a "positive action." The Zikists lost no time in trying to whip up excitement both in Lagos and in the provinces. In late November 1948, a seven-point instruction was passed on to branches outside Lagos for implementation. These were:

(I)"A campaign should be held by summoning meetings with executives of private unions, family unions, headmasters, explaining to them the need for progressive revolution beginning with civil disobedience without violence or non-cooperation;"

(II)"If our men now standing trial are sentenced without option of fine, the workers and market women should make positive demands to

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52. Ibid.

government to release them. Such demands should be followed up with an ultimatum, organised slow strike and stop marketing;"

(III)"In the event of the government contravening such ultimatum, a country-wide demonstration should follow by damaging mercantile houses, prison walls, post offices, police barracks and police rifles should be seized first; time limit for all these will be December 24th 1948;"

(IV)"Our order to all branches should read as follows: "I believe in genuine and beneficial co-operation - ZAKARI;"

(V)"On receipt of this instruction, summon all regional presidents and secretaries and distribute these instructions to them";

(VI)"From now onwards all private and important documents should be dispatched to the headquarters only by sending a messenger by land;" and,

(VII)"Our struggle for freedom does not consist only in pouring abuse, what we need to do is to wage war on those forces against us."<sup>53</sup>

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53. Ibid, pp 3-4.

These instructions led to the mobilisation of groups to disrupt the preliminary proceedings in the sedition cases against the Zikists in Lagos as well as a demonstration in Onitsha that prompted the closure of the market for one day.<sup>54</sup> On this occasion, Abdallah and Oged Macaulay were arrested, leaving Eze, Okoye, Ndulue and others to continue with the struggle. On September 5, 1949, the Zikist Movement, under the temporary leadership of Eze and Okoye, issued an operation order to its members to organise "a peasant movement throughout the country."<sup>55</sup>

In addition, members were implored to infiltrate trade unions and seek positions within those organisations to prepare the way for later civil disobedience demonstrations.<sup>56</sup> Young people were also encouraged to "embrace active revolution and deliberate group violation of every law and executive order."<sup>57</sup> That Marxist-Leninist tenets and

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54. Ibid.

55. NSUDIV8/1/305: "Why Government Banned the Zikist Movement."

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

the vision of a Nigerian Communist State inspired this operational order is clear in its call for active revolution and for the re-awakening of the peasantry and proletariat.

In late February of 1950, Nigerian police and Special Branch agents raided the Zikist Movement's headquarters, arresting sixteen people. Three were discharged, one was fined £25, ten were sentenced to six-month imprisonment, and two others were given terms of two to four weeks.<sup>58</sup> Mokuwugo Okoye, the secretary-general of the Zikist Movement, received the harshest sentence: a prison term of thirty-three months for possessing seditious documents. Hence, when others regained their freedom, he was still serving his sentence despite Ndulue's solicitation of the British Labour Party members of parliament, Fenner Brockway and Reginald Sorenson, to lobby for a Royal pardon.<sup>59</sup>

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58. CO537/7171: "The Zikist Movement, 1949," PRO, London; M Amechi, *The Forgotten Heroes of Nigerian Independence*, p 91. Amechi was the Assistant Secretary-General of Eze's Nigeria National Federation of Labour in 1950, as well as Assistant Secretary, Public Utility Board Staff Union.

59. CO537/7171: "The Zikist Movement;" see Ndulue's letter to Labour MP Fenner Brockway enclosed.

Brockway's appeal to the Secretary of State for the Colonies was turned down because in the first instance the Governor and not the Secretary of State exercised the Royal Prerogative for the Colonies. The Secretary of State for the Colonies only intervened if there was evidence of a failure of due process in the colonial courts. A Colonial Office official noted that "the circumstances of the case do not justify his own intervention in a matter in which the Governor is in the best position to judge the desirability or otherwise of exercising his powers."<sup>60</sup>

The Colonial Office was therefore right to have concluded, "It was not only wrong for Brockway to send an appeal directly to London, the Zikists were engaged in a plot and not a riot, and as such the invocation of liberalism to permit the release of those found guilty of plotting violence is a trifle inappropriate."<sup>61</sup>

While chapter six addresses United States reactions to the leftists' problem, it is important

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60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

to stress now those Anglo-American anxieties about the mix of communism and Zikists' activities were not limited to known nationalist groups. Intelligence reports confirmed that nationalist organisations had abetted the Marxist penetration of student groups and labour unions as well. In Lagos, American diplomats and British administrators were concerned about growing radical tendencies within the University College, Ibadan. As Erwin Keeler noted in a dispatch to the State Department in Washington D.C. "The intensely political and radical atmosphere of the campus is already established, with the encouragement and direct assistance by the local nationalist leaders."<sup>62</sup>

As evidence that nationalist leaders had targeted the College, Keeler recalled the remarks of Kingsley Mbadiwe, an *NCNC* leader, during the 1952 budget session of the Nigerian House of Representatives.<sup>63</sup> During the discussion of government financial support of the College, Mbadiwe stated that, "If money was to be spent upon the

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62. Ibid.

63. "Keeler to Department of State: Communism in Nigeria-August 14, 1953," File745H.001/8-1453, College Park, Maryland, p 4.

College it should and must be made a place where young Nigerians were trained to be nationalists."<sup>64</sup> Such statements convinced Keeler that Nigerian students made "a prime target of the communists at such future time as the opportunity might become auspicious for them."<sup>65</sup> As chapters three through eight shows, it was the direction of things in the labour unions that provoked the most vociferous official anxiety.

There were some Nigerians who believed in the assurance of independence within a reasonable period. They were not interested in whether it is linked with any political or economic thought. What was important to them is independence from the colonial power. Mbonu Ojike, Area Council/NNDP member of the Lagos Town Council aptly represent this school of thought when he writes inter alia in *The Road to Freedom* that;

We should not be afraid if the economy is linked to any form of -ism. All he needs is GROWTH. Capitalism, socialism, or communism, which ever answers his call most effectively, let him pursue it unafraid of name-calling propaganda. Let him follow any economic road that most quickly leads

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64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

towards freedom to transact business in his own country and with the outer world.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the process by which Marxian ideology gained prominence in the Zikist movement. To the young people, the realisation of a Marxian vision through the NCNC would have been feasible but for Azikiwe's ideological re-orientation and complacency for a Marxian pathway to independence. Understandably, Marxists pursued their own ideological strategy, endeavouring to develop a nation-wide Marxist group separate and apart from the existing nationalist group. The next chapter discusses these efforts during the 1950s.

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<sup>66</sup> M Ojike, *The Road to Freedom* (London, 1949).