

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROFILING NIGERIAN MARXISTS

#### Introduction

Nigerian leftists were not insulated from their counterparts along the West Coast of Africa and across the Atlantic Ocean. As noble patriots, Nigerian leftists propagated their views through newspapers, intellectual debates, and political activism in youth organisations, the labour movement, and nationalist parties. It seems the ghosts of I.T.A. Wallace and Frank Macaulay remained with the Nigerian leftists throughout the 1950s and afterwards. Throughout the 1930s these men corresponded with George Padmore and *The Negro Worker* where they published articles denouncing British colonial rule in Nigeria and exposing U.S. race relations to colonial people. Frank Macaulay's untimely death in 1931 and Wallace departure for his native country, Sierra Leone, in 1933, halted Marxist orientation among Nigerians. In fact, continued hostility toward leftist ideology and the banning of Marxist, socialist,

and Black radical publications from abroad only heightened interests among Nigerian leftists. It is in the light of this that a summarization of the profiles of some of the leftists is relevant.

### **The Front-liners**

In chapter three we discussed the role of Marxists such as Samuel Ikoku, Ayo Ogunseye, and various Marxist organisations set up during the 1950s. In this chapter, we focus on selected individuals to buttress the view that Marxism permeated souls and minds of some Nigerians despite official opposition. The careers of Nduka Eze, Gogo Chu Nzeribe, Samuel Akpata, H.O. Davies, and Funmilayo Kuti to mention a few, in labour unionism and the nationalist movement further explain attempts by Marxists to infiltrate into sectors of the Nigerian colonial state. While there were other leftists during the same period, these men are unique in view of their credentials. Concerning Eze for instance, records from the Communist

Party of Great Britain (CPGB) indicates that he was "the most outstanding" personality in "the history of the Nigerian working class movement" during the colonial era.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1950 remained memorable in the life of Nduka Eze. First, he established contact with the CPGB leaders such as Harry Pollitt, Margot, Barbara Ruheman, and Idris Cox, perhaps through Okafor and Onowochei who had joined the CPGB around 1946 in England. Second, he was instrumental in the publication of *Labour Champion*, the first Nigerian labour newspaper. Though short-lived, *Labour Champion* was a clear expression of Marxist influence, with a strong emphasis on the principles of international unity. Through this paper, he was in close contact with officials of the *Daily Worker*, a communist newspaper in London. In

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1. CP/CENT/INT/24/04: "Draft Discussion Document," November 1951, NMLHA, p 3. For a detailed theoretical reconstruction see RJC Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Massachusetts/Oxford, 2001), pp 217-230, 239-242, 274-292. On general history of the CPGB, see, N Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927-1941* (London, 1987); *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1941-1951* (London, 1997).

fact, he was reported to have sent one of his young reporters, Idise Dafe, to the *Daily Worker* (London) to be trained as a journalist.<sup>2</sup> Eze had earlier sought financial support from the British TUC in setting up the *Labour Champion* in June 1949.<sup>3</sup>

However, the response was negative because TUC officials were clearly informed about Eze's role in the defunct Nigerian Trades Union Congress in March 1949 and his Marxian indoctrination.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Labour Adviser in Nigeria, Roberts Curry, was not in support of Eze's appeal as he viewed it as one of the Communists tactics of persons presenting

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2. CP/CENT/INT/50/3: "Marxist" Groups in Nigeria - Draft for Commission, August 4, 1953, NMLHA; CO537/5807: R.J. Vile to J.K. Thompson, pp 1-24; also, "AMCONGEN, Lagos to Department of State: The Case of Nduka Eze-Communist Leader in Nigeria," File745H.00/8-251, NARA, p 1. At the peak of his career, he became the Action Group chairman for Asaba District in 1956. One can conclude that this was largely because of the success of government anti-communist measures. Nduka Eze died however in December 1995. Access to his private papers, if any, would illuminate our knowledge about his life.

3. Mss292/File 966.3/2, Nduka Eze to Mr. Kemmis, Secretary TUC Colonial Advisory Committee, June 7, 1949, TUC Registry Files 1948-51, Modern Record Centre, The University of Warwick, Warwick, England.

4. Ibid. Curry to Tewson, March 23, 1949; Curry to H.B. Kemmis, June 24, 1949.

themselves as pro-Western leaders in the colonies only to propagate Communist ideology through the paper. In his words: "Eze's methods are typically Communist, his speeches and press reports are very obviously inspired from outside sources."<sup>5</sup>

Eze was, at one time, President-General of the Zikist Movement, the Secretary of the United African Company Workers' Union and the Nigerian National Federation of Labour, a breakaway organisation from the (Nigeria) Trade Union Congress, and the Secretary of the National Scholarships Board formed in May 1950. Of Igbo origin, he joined the UAC as a manager-in-training in 1944. He took an active part in trade union activities and in 1946 became the secretary of his branch of the UAC Workers Union.<sup>6</sup>

There are conflicting reports about the circumstances that led to his exit from the UAC

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5. Ibid. Curry to Tewson, March 23, 1949.

6. CO537/3649: "Nigeria-Political Summary", p 2.

staff list. To the CPGB, Eze left the UAC voluntarily in 1947 after many "attempts by the management to buy<sup>7</sup> him off and intimidate him failed".<sup>8</sup> To British officials, however, many activists had indeed being sacked but for a variety of reasons including, as in Eze's case, "insubordination."<sup>9</sup>

As President of the Lagos branch, executive member and later President of the Zikist Movement, Eze constantly inspired and educated young men in the movement in the spirit of Marxism. He taught Marxism, not in the abstract, but in relation to the needs of the Nigerian Labour movement and the political situation in Nigeria generally. He gathered around himself a group of young men who had developed a deep interest in Marxism, composed of Osita Agwuna, O.I. Dafe, J. Onwugbuzio,

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7. CP/CENT/INT/24/04: "Draft Discussion Document."

8. Ibid.

9. "...The Case of Nduka Eze..." File745H.00/8-251, In fact, Eze and some ex-Zikists had by 1951, renounced Zikism for a more specific ideology of revolutionary socialism. See, R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, p 81.

Mokwugo Okoye, G. Nzeribe, I. Nzimiro, A. Ikoro, Ezuma, C.K. Opara, Mallam Abdallah, M. Kolagbodi, Chikwendu Nwariaku, and others who began to apply Marxism in their practical political activities and carried it to the labour movement.<sup>10</sup>

It was through many of his activities that he sought and received supports from Communist bodies in Europe. One of his activities was in connection with the selection of Nigerian students for study in East Germany and Czechoslovakia.<sup>11</sup> In order to succeed in this he formed the National Scholarships Board in 1950. Needless to say Eze and his group were in close contact with the Free German Youth in East Germany. The *Free German Youth* (FGY) sent a message of solidarity to Eze on the Enugu

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10. CP/CENT/INT/24/04: Draft Discussion Document. Teachings and lectures were based on CPGB document, "Essentials of Communist Theory: A Three Lesson Syllabus". See, CP/CENT/ED/1/4: "Essentials..." September 5, 1943.

11. CAB134/1353: Communist Penetration - Africa Report, 1958, PRO, London. More information about the activities of the Czechs is yet to be unfolded due to non-availability of records.

incident.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the *FGY* had since 1950 made specific offers indicating that they were prepared to admit selected Nigerian students into East Germany to study at universities or secondary schools. The *FGY* also stressed that all expenses, once the students were across the German border, would be paid by them.<sup>13</sup>

Immediately there followed local advertisements sponsored by the newly formed National Scholarships Board under the presidency of Folarin Coker<sup>14</sup> and the secretaryship of Nduka Eze. An unspecified number of scholarships were allotted for university training. For secondary education, ten places were made available for applicants not exceeding fourteen years of age. Moreover, all board, tuition and lodging were free and the Scholarships Board was apparently prepared to

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12. "The Case of Nduka Eze," File745H.00/8-251, NARA, p 2.

13. CO537/4632: Nigeria - Political Summary. Folarin Coker later reneged on communism. See his letter to Miss Darlow of *The Guild*, University College, Exeter, United Kingdom.

14. "The Case of Nduka Eze" File745H.00/8-251, NARA, p 2.



provide passage money. Importantly, such students were to be recommended by 'democratic organisations' after the payment of a small affiliation fee.<sup>15</sup>

By October 1950 the Board was able to send two students, who were accompanied by one N.E. Kolagbodi, an ex-Zikist, to Berlin and Prague. And by early November 1950, about six and nine students respectively had applied for placement at secondary schools and universities in Berlin and Prague through the Board.<sup>16</sup> In order to expedite processing of the students' passage, Edward Onowochei, a Nigerian member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was appointed London liaison officer for Eze's National Scholarships Board. He was in charge of student welfare and their onward passage to either Berlin or Prague.<sup>17</sup> In 1951, the American Consul General in Nigeria, A.W. Childs concluded that,

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15. Ibid.

16. Ibid, p 3.

17. Ibid.

"Onowochei was directing the entire scheme and appeared to act as liaison officer with both the Free German Youth and the Communist Party of Great Britain."<sup>18</sup>

In March 1951, another batch of seven students arrived in Berlin. The eighth was held up for some time by legal complications in London, but she later arrived in Berlin in April.<sup>19</sup> It was reported that apart from Onowochei, the CPGB and WFTU, the Czech and Soviet Embassies assisted Nigerians, as well as other colonial students' journeys to Berlin and Prague.<sup>20</sup>

By April 1951, a report from Germany indicated that students were provided by the Soviets with clothing, food and recreation. And, more importantly, "political science" became a mandatory course that must be taken by all students, particularly those from colonies.

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

During the same month, fifteen students were selected for the Agricultural and Forestry Workers Scholarship in Eastern Germany.<sup>21</sup> By May 1951, another batch of eight students was sent to Berlin under the Scholarships Board scheme. Despite strict observation of non-issuance of international passports to Nigerians intending to go behind the Iron Curtain, Eze's machinations seemed to succeed. A.W. Childs noted that, "in at least one and probably more cases passports have been obtained by means of forged application and blank passport forms."<sup>22</sup> This led to criticism of the local passport authority in Lagos for "laxness in allowing blank passports to be stolen and not controlling immigration more efficiently to prevent students from reaching Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany and Russia."<sup>23</sup>

These events soon led men of the Nigerian police and the Special Branch to raid the

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21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

headquarters of the NSB in July 1951. Eze and Onwurike (a beneficiary of the NSB Award) were arrested and charged with being in possession of forged passports and blank forms. Further investigations resulted in the arrest of an immigration police corporal, Ajayi Busari, in November 1951. Onwurike and Eze were fined £10 and £50 respectively for possessing a false passport. On the other hand, Busari was sentenced to three years imprisonment for theft and sale of passports and passport application forms and making false entries in the passport register.<sup>24</sup>

Nduka Eze was involved in labour unionism, which was his primary constituency for the greater part of his career. As he did for the Scholarships Board, he was able to gather funds for the labour movement to foster their anti-British activities. His first move in

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24. "Fortnightly Review: November 4-17, 1951, File745H.00/11-1951;" "Fortnightly Review: July 2-14, 1951, File745H.00/7-1751;" "Fortnightly Review: August 12-25, 1951, File745.008/8-2751; and "Fortnightly Newsletter, December 16-29, 1951, File745H.00/12-2951; NARA.

labour movement was to dislodge pro-Western leaders such as Adio-Moses from the Nigerian TUC in late 1949. His formation of the Nigerian National Federation of Labour in late 1949 was the seal of his dominance of the labour movement in Nigeria during the period. By 1950 he had affiliated the body with the World Federation of Trade Unions in Paris, and established a fraternity with the Communist Party of Great Britain.

It was through his links with the WFTU and the CPGB that he was able to get sponsorships from these bodies and other satellite groups. In early 1951, the sum of £2,300 was transferred from the Communist Third International in Prague to Ezuma's account at the Barclays Bank DC and O in Lagos. There is need for a historical background to the WFTU grant. When the *Labour Champion* could not meet its financial obligations in late 1950, it naturally died. Attempts to resuscitate it led to Eze, Ikoro, Ezuma and Nzimiro's appeal to WFTU early in 1951.

Ezuma was sent to Paris to solicit for WFTU assistance under the guise that the *Labour Champion* belonged to the Nigerian Labour Congress. Naturally, it was easy for the sympathy of the WFTU to be enlisted for the only newspaper owned by the workers of Nigeria. And more importantly they were aware about Eze's credentials as a frontline Marxist. Two errors were committed: the first was belief that the *Labour Champion* was owned by the NLC, and second, the deposit of the grant into a private account - Ezuma's.<sup>25</sup> It is however unfortunate that the *Labour Champion* was never resuscitated despite the receipt of the money. The U.S. consular noted that the sum of £200 was given to the Nigerian Labour Congress on the agreement that certain Communist sympathisers were nominated to the executive of the Congress.<sup>26</sup> Later in the year, WFTU

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25. CONSUL, Lagos to Department of State: Communist Fund for Nigerian Labor - August 19, 1951," File745H.001/1-1951, NARA.

26. CP/CENT/INT/25/01: Report on the Trade Union Movement in Nigeria, autumn 1951, NMLHA, p 7.

deposited another £2,000 into the account of the union.<sup>27</sup> It was thus, easy for the *Daily Times* and the *West African Pilot*, to "prove that the Communist World, far from trying to help Nigerian workers was aiming at financing disruptive activities in Nigeria."<sup>28</sup>

The aftermath was a crisis in the labour union and a split in *All-Nigeria Trade Union Federation* (ANTUF), which led to the emergence of new groups.<sup>29</sup> While those who objected to the communist fund later formed the National Council of Trade Unions, Nigeria, the Left Wing emerged under the name of Trade Union Congress, Nigeria (TUCN). The National Council of Trade Unions, Nigeria, under Borha, Adio-Moses and Adebola, were in support of an affiliation with the *International Confederation of Trade Unions* (ICFTU), while the Trade Union Congress, Nigeria, (TUCN) under Eze, Nzeribe, Imoudu and

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27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid, p 8.

Wahab Goodluck, preferred to join the *World Federation of Trade Unions* (WFTU).<sup>30</sup> The split in the labour movement during the period could be interpreted as a struggle between communism and capitalism.<sup>31</sup>

The split did not, however, solve the problem among the Left-Wing as several hundreds of workers who lost their jobs in December 1950 when a communist-organised general strike failed demanded strike and unemployment pay.<sup>32</sup> A member union of the Congress, the *Nigeria Brewery Workers' Union*, demanded that a General Council meeting of the Congress be called forthwith to discuss the allocation of the communist funds.<sup>33</sup> There was also dissension in the union as to the control and expenditure of

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30. W Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria* (London, 1969), pp 141, 298, 300 and 322; R Cohen, *Labour and Politics in Nigeria* (2nd Edition, London, 1981), p 79; MA Tokunboh, *Labour Movement in Nigeria, Past and Present* (Lagos, 1985), pp 50-58.

31. "Communist Fund for Nigerian Labor Union," File745H.001/1-1951, NARA. Also, see, *Daily Mirror* (London), January 18, 1951. W Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, pp 141-155.

32. "Review of Recent Labor Developments in Nigeria - August 8, 1958", File845H.06/8-857, NARA, p 3.

33. "The Case of Nduka Eze," p 1.



union funds. When members of the *Trade Union Congress* began to make allegations of corruption against Eze, the colonial administration effectively used this to clamp down on him by charging him with corruption and other offences, such as passport forging.<sup>34</sup>

It must be stated that Eze's activities in Nigeria attracted the attention of the CPGB leaders in London. Some of them believed that he had shown some leadership quality and could lead a Marxist party if given further support. Not all CPGB leaders were in favour of Eze however. There were some who were worried about Nigeria trade union members' allegations of corruption against Eze and his vulnerability to government in this regard.

Gogo Chu Nzeribe was born in 1930 at Oguta. He was educated at the prestigious King's College, Lagos. Like Eze, he had served as councillor on the Lagos Town Council in 1950-51. Nzeribe was the founding secretary of

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<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.*

the *All-Nigeria Trade Union Federation*.<sup>35</sup> He was also the Secretary General of the Union of Posts and Telecommunications Workers of Nigeria from 1952 to 1954. To British officials, Nzeribe was a rebel, while to his opponents he was a communist. To the Americans, he was "a courageous champion of the rights of the workers and certainly a radical and probably a communist sympathizer."<sup>36</sup>

He soon proved officials right, when, on the morning of March 19, 1958, an estimated 3,000 employees of the Posts and Telegraphs Department ceased work in response to a call to strike by Gogo Chu Nzeribe.<sup>37</sup> Although Nzeribe described it as a "48-hour protest demonstration" against management inefficiency

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35. "Recent Labor Developments" File845H.06/8-857, NARA, p 3; EA Egboh, "The Early Years of Trade Unionism in Nigeria," *Africa Quarterly*, Volume viii, no1, April-June 1968, pp 59-69; Richard Sklar cannot be right when he referred to Gogo Chu Nzeribe as "a relatively unknown candidate at the 1953 All-Nigerian Trade Union Movement conference." See R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, p 81 and 529.

36. "Recent Labor Developments," File845H.06/8-857, NARA.

37. *Ibid.*

and ineptitude, the government and the press described it as a communist tactic to attack the government.<sup>38</sup>

By this period, anti-Marxist policies had become an instrument used by many folks (both officials and non-officials) to silence opposition. The management of Posts and Telegraph were no exception to the "Nigerian-McCarthyism." They concluded that the strike was a Marxist-inspired disrespect for a peaceful labour negotiation and resolution of the situation. While not denying Nzeribe's socialist inclination, management's conclusion of the strike as being sponsored by Communists is however suspect and inaccurate. It nonetheless highlights the fear of the Nigerian Federal Labour Minister, Okotie-Eboh, in July 1957 concerning the potentials of Gogo Chu Nzeribe.<sup>39</sup>

The strike was significant in several respects. Firstly, it was the most efficiently

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38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

organised and most widely based strike to have occurred in the country in several years. Secondly, the secrecy with which the strike was arranged, taking the public and the government by complete surprise, was little short of astounding. Thirdly, one can say that the complete ruthlessness and disregard for public welfare, which characterised the strike suggests, and was condemned by the press, as communist tactics.<sup>40</sup> Nigerian administrators and politicians who had assumed partial governance during the mid-1950s did not take kindly to leftist ideology in labour unions. To the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, Francis Nwokedi, "the disruptive tactics employed by Nzeribe were typically communist," and to the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, "the government probably underestimated him."<sup>41</sup>

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40. Mss292/File 966.3/3: Footnotes on visit of Nigerian Ministers - Okotie-Eboh and C. Okwu, July 2, 1957, TUC Registry Files 1951-60, Modern Record Centre, Warwick.

41. "Recent Labor Developments," File845H.06/8-857. Perhaps one can argue that this was purely a trade union tactics.

Another closely monitored and highly educated communist during the period was Samuel Bankole Akpata. Born in Lagos in 1920, Akpata was educated at Umuahia Government College, and Yaba Higher College, where he spent two years. From Yaba, he went to the United Kingdom in 1941 to study at London University. It was there that he associated with *W.A.S.U; Communist Party of Great Britain; World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Union of Students*, and the *Free German Youth*. By late 1945 he had been elected into the executive of the WFDY. Also in late 1945, Akpata was involved in the formation of the West African National Secretariat. The antecedent was a secret meeting held with Nkrumah, Botsio, Nikoi, Wallace and Awooner-Renner in London.

At the meeting, the party agreed to "form a radical progressive organisation for seizing power in Africa as quickly as possible." Their ultimate aim was "national unity, independence

and a union of African Socialist Republic."<sup>42</sup> He was an assistant secretary, and later secretary, of the WANS in early 1947. He also supported the Gold Coast Students Union rally at Trafalgar Square on March 8, 1948, where he denounced the colonial Government's handling of the February 1948 riot in Accra.<sup>43</sup>

The *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* later offered him a scholarship to read for his Masters and Ph.D. at the Charles University, Prague, in 1949. Between 1949 and 1953 he attended various communist conferences, among them the *World Federation of Democratic Youth* conference in Budapest in 1949, where he claimed to represent *Youth Congress of Nigeria*, and the communist organised Berlin Conference of 1951. He returned to Nigeria in July 1953 and was appointed Secretary General of the *Railway Workers Union* on a salary of £240 per

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42. See, M Sherwood, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Years Abroad, 1935 -1947* (Legon, 1996), pp 125-127.

43. Ibid, p 153. We must state that Samuel Akpata is not the same as Ayo Akpata, who later became an Assistant Registrar, Student Affairs, University of Ibadan in 1963.

annum.<sup>44</sup> At the height of his career, he became the Librarian of the University College, Ibadan.<sup>45</sup>

Anglo-American intelligence reports also focused on a prominent Queen's lawyer, H.O. Davies. A Lagosian, Davies studied law in London and was called to the bar before returning to Nigeria. His activities as a member of the West African Students Union during the 1920s is well documented and need not be repeated here.<sup>46</sup> Davies, more than anyone else, was the defender of the radicals and professed Marxists in Nigeria during the period under review. Apart from his legal work, he formed an embryonic political party called the *People's Congress Party*. He also established a

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44. CO1039/34: Nigerian Council of Ministers Miscellaneous Papers 1954, PRO, London.

45. Sherwood, M. *Kwame Nkrumah*, p 128. We must acknowledge that further study on Dr. Bankole Akpata still need to be done to unearth his role in Ghana and Nigeria during the period.

46. HO Davies, *Memoirs* (Ibadan, 1989). GO Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925-1958* (Ibadan, 1982). H Adi, "Anti-Colonial Activity in Britain," in Toyin Falola, (ed.) *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century*, pp 315-332.

newspaper called *The Nigerian People's Voice*.<sup>47</sup>  
The *PCP* seems to have had two major planks in its platform: a denunciation of Nigerian tribalism and regionalism, and support of the workers with a "self characterisation of being the friend of the workers."<sup>48</sup>

Robert Ross, the American vice consul, summarised the place of Davies during the period under review thus: "... a man to watch on the local political scene as a potentially strong leader of the Leftist elements of the politically conscious minority in Nigeria. He might well become a likely candidate to fill the position of chief communist contact because of his very high intellect and political maturity."<sup>49</sup> Ironically, Ross was proved wrong by later events as Davies pitched camp with Azikiwe in the *NCNC*, a party considered, like

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47. "AMCONSUL, Lagos to Department of State: Development of two Leftist Groups - October 25, 1951," File745H.00/10-2351, NARA, pp 2-3.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*



the *Action Group* and the *Northern People's Congress*, as favouring constitutional and gradual decolonisation, rather than the revolutionary liberation of Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> He, like Azikiwe, opted for Fabian socialism and pragmatic ideas that preached non-violence. This was one of the ways through which Azikiwe contained the Leftists in the NCNC.<sup>51</sup>

We should note that Ross was not the only one that was proved wrong. Leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain (who had hoped for his leadership of a Marxist group that would metamorphose into a Nigeria Communist party) were also disappointed about his liberal attitude towards British rule in Nigeria after 1945. Davies had been close with some British members of the CPGB during the World War II and immediately after.

He was reported to have visited the CPGB office while in London as a student. The case

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50. *Ibid.*

51. For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see, R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, p 115; HI Tijani, "McCarthyism in Colonial Nigeria." RJC

of Davies is that of someone in search of knowledge. He was interested in knowing about Marxism and communism and whether it could be adapted to the situation in the colony. A CPGB document in late 1951 titled; "Draft Discussion on the Nature and Personnel of the Leadership of the Nigerian Trade Union and National Movement", highlights the disappointment of the organisation about Davies' switch to the right.<sup>52</sup>

Their hope in him as a leader of a Marxist group was dashed as he joined the NCNC. Leaders of the CPGB concluded that Davies "character as a Yoruba separatist and splitter of the national movement is now so well known that it requires no further comment."<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, anxiety about communism during the 1950s can be seen in the way Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was treated by the government. The wife of Reverend Ransome-Kuti,

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Robert, *Postcolonialism*, pp 68 & 227.

52 . CP/CENT/INT/24/04: Draft Discussion Document, p 1.

53. *Ibid.*

Funmilayo was, perhaps, the most vocal and radically educated woman in Nigeria during the devolution period. She and her husband had been exposed internationally through close contacts with Ladipo Solanke (founder of WASU), Reginald Sorenson, Arthur and Violet Creech Jones, Freda Grimble, and the Labour Party leadership before 1947.<sup>54</sup> It has to be noted that none of these people was remotely connected with communism. They nonetheless inspired her in her attitude and perception of British rule in Nigeria.

She was included as a member of the *NCNC* delegation to London in 1947 to present the views of the party on the Richards Constitution to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It was during this period that she joined the *Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)*, a USSR inspired organisation founded in Paris in 1945. Its aims were to "unite women

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54. See, "Letter from Mrs. Freda Gimble, London Women's Parliament Committee," August 29, 1947, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Papers (FRK), University of Ibadan, Nigeria. B Awe, (ed.) *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspectives* (Lagos, 1992). C Johnson-Odim & NE Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Illinois, 1997), particularly chapter six "For Their Freedoms - The International Sphere."

regardless of race, nationality, religion and political opinion, so that they may work together to win, implement and defend national independence and democratic freedoms, eliminate apartheid, racial discrimination and fascism; work for peace and universal disarmament."<sup>55</sup>

Between 1946 and 1957, Funmilayo was involved in the *WIDF* activities. She, in fact, contributed a chapter in a communist sponsored book in 1948 where she criticised British rule in Nigeria and called for the improvement of women's condition in the colonies and protectorates.<sup>56</sup> She attended a *WIDF* conference in Vienna on the defence of children on April 9, 1952, as well as participated during the Copenhagen Congress in June 1953 where she was elected as one of the vice-presidents of the *WIDF*. Her paper was published along with others in 1954 by *WIDF* entitled "*That They May Live:*

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55. See "Letter from Mrs. Freda Gimble, London Women's Parliament Committee," August 29, 1947, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Papers (FRK), University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

56. See, "Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Diary 1952," FRK Papers, University of

*African Women Arise.*" It was no surprise that, the government banned *WIDF* literature in July 1954 after the visit of the organisation's Secretary General to Funmilayo at Abeokuta in the same month.<sup>57</sup>

With her international connections, she formed an embryonic organisation called the *National Women's Union* (NWU) in 1952, through which she sought to educate women about their socio-economic conditions under the British rule. It is worthy of note that, under Funmilayo, the NWU successfully organised women against a government water rate levy in Abeokuta district in 1952.

Such activities only allowed government to see her as a radical and a communist sympathiser. And in 1955, she was refused a passport to travel to Helsinki, Finland, to

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Ibadan, Nigeria.

57. See, *The Women of Asia and Africa: Documents* (Prague, 1948), and "Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Diary 1952," FRK Papers, Ibadan.

attend a communist sponsored World Assembly of Peace.<sup>58</sup>

Funmilayo was also actively involved with other radical and socialist inclined organisations during and after the colonial period. As far back as 1949, Funmilayo had contacted Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association's Women's Corp.<sup>59</sup> She also corresponded with women in Trinidad, Korea and Vietnam. In Africa, she visited the Gold Coast (Ghana) several times and assisted in the formation of its Women's Movement in 1960.<sup>60</sup>

Her quest for women development was also instrumental in her joining the British Women's International Association, a non-communist organisation in 1952. Although McGregor Wood, leader of BWIA was sceptical about Funmilayo's ideological leaning, Solanke assured her that

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<sup>58</sup> SD/B9: "Passport - Mr. Prime Minister: Statement in Parliament," Government Publications (Lagos, 1964); West African Pilot, August 4, 1954.

<sup>59</sup> NE Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised* (Berkeley, 1982), pp 142-164. Also, Solanke Paper, Box 73, File 81, August 20, 1952, Gandhi Library, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

"Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti is not a communist."<sup>61</sup> This assurance from the WASU leader and Funmilayo's correspondence with Wood was instrumental in the acceptance of her membership and the affiliation of the Nigerian Women Association to BWIA.

Funmilayo's case shows that some nationalists were only interested in how they could benefit from some international organisations as a means towards achieving their set goal. While it has been difficult to identify other nationalists in this category, one can argue that it was a miscalculation for any nationalist to have joined a pro-communist organisation during the period. While official intelligence reports maintained that she was a communist, her biographers are of the view that Funmilayo was a pragmatist unwilling to be controlled by any of them (East or West).<sup>62</sup>

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60. See "Correspondence, Box 4," FRK Papers, Ibadan.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Johnson-Odim & Mba, *For Women and the Nation*, pp 137-151.

Although she was allowed to visit Peking in 1956 to attend a *WIDF* council meeting, her passport was not endorsed for the 1957 *WIDF* conference. It should be stressed that leading nationalists who occupied high office during the mid-1950s maintained anti-leftist measures hitherto in place. Official non-endorsement of Funmilayo's passport drew many criticisms as it was a restriction of individual freedom of movement and expression. In response Balewa, as the Head of Government Business (later Prime Minister) remarked that "in the past when it was thought Mrs. Kuti might be an innocent victim of communist schemes, she was informed officially... but now it can be assumed that it is her intention to influence the various Nigerian women's organisations with which she is connected with communist ideas and policies... On those grounds the government would not renew her passport."<sup>63</sup> Despite her

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63. Newspaper reports of the incident can be found in *West African Pilot*, December 30, 1957. *Daily Times* (Nigeria), January 21, 1957. *Daily Service* (Nigeria) March 4, 1958.



protests, Balewa's government did not change its decision until after independence when approval was given for the renewal of her passport.<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Marxism and leftist ideology generally was seen as a threat to the sustenance of a "nurtured capitalism" in Nigeria and the survival of a worldwide capitalism. In Nigeria during the period under review, some of the labour leaders particularly the younger elements imbibed the leftist ideology. The ideology of the left assumed a potent force within the labour and trade unions largely because of the activities of people like Eze, Nzeribe, Akpata, Bassey, Imoudu, and Wahab Goodluck. With the banning of the Zikist Movement in April 1950, efforts to rejuvenate Marxist ideas within the nationalist and labour groups were met with counter-measures by the central and regional

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64. *Ibid.*

governments. Hence Marxist organisations that emerged afterwards enjoyed, at best, a suspended animation as they found it difficult to co-exist with the stiff government measures.<sup>65</sup> Henceforth, leftist groups' efforts to gain minimal success were met with anti-leftist policies initiated from time to time by colonial government, and later postcolonial pro-Western governments, at the central and regional levels.

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65. "Communism in Nigeria Today," File 745H.001/8-1453, NARA.