

CHAPTER FIVE

"NIGERIA-MCCARTHYISM": NO JOB FOR THE RED? ¹

Introduction

Post-war colonial policies in British West Africa were predicated on the success of official initiatives about colonial development, race relations, devolution, and the eventual transfer of power. Success, however, involved measures aimed at destroying any form of radical nationalism. Colonial officials were concerned about growing leftist nationalism, increasing Marxist literature in the colonies, and funds from a Communist network into the colonies during the decolonisation era. Both colonial and nationalist governments were bent on preventing leftists from being employed in the public service. These measures can be described as "Nigeria-McCarthyism."

Metropolitan Initiatives

In 1950, Nigeria was placed in the special category of front-line colonies because "it had become a major object of Soviet Cold War attention."² On May 1, 1951,

1. Part of this chapter is published as "McCarthyism in colonial Nigeria: The Ban on the Employment of the Communists," in A Oyebadé, (ed.) *The Foundations of Nigeria* (Trenton, 2003), pp 645-668.

2. CO537/6783: Communism in West Africa – Appointments to University Colleges, 1950–1952, (Minutes of September 19, 1950) PRO, London. The background to this was the

Governor John Macpherson requested approval from James Griffiths, the secretary of state for the colonies, to ban communists from government employment.³ Griffiths' response was that the Nigerian Council of Ministers should deliberate on the matter. However, it was not until May 25, 1954, that the federal Council of Ministers asked for the submission of a paper on steps that might be taken against communist infiltration into the civil service and trade union movement. It seems that this was provoked by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's speech at the Gold Coast Legislative Assembly on February 25, 1954, in which he stated that his government would in the future refuse to employ in certain branches of the public service persons who had proved to be active communists.⁴ These branches were the administrative, education, community development, labour, information services, police, army, and the Gold Coast commissioners' Offices overseas. Two years later Nkrumah was proud to say that "the infiltration by Communist

appointment of two communists in 1948 and 1950 to the teaching staff. J. W. Harris and J. Harper were appointed before the introduction of the vetting system and the Immigration Ordinance of 1950.

3. Ibid. Minutes of November 2, 1951.

4. Ibid. Macpherson to secretary of state for colonies - James Griffiths, May 1, 1951.

agents into `our workers' organisations has now been completely checked."⁵

The background to colonial government's ban on the employment of Communists and fellow travelers cannot be fully understood without elaborating the metropolitan initiatives. Despite the Labour government's past relationship with the Communist Party and the Labor movement generally, the British (and the colonial government) government was sincere in its anti-Communist positions. Participants at the various Labour Party annual conferences during the 1940s noted the fundamental differences between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. As one participant put it: "... our Party seeks to achieve Socialism by persuasion and the ballot boxes in contrast to the Communist party doctrine of the overthrow of capitalism by armed force if necessary..."⁶ This partly explains the futile attempts to affiliate the Communist Party with the Labour Party during the 1946 and 1947 conferences.⁷

5. Ibid. *Manchester Guardian*, October 28, 1956.

6. *The Labour Party Annual Report 1947-1948*, "Campaign Against Communism," (London, 1948), pp 205-208.

7. Ibid, p 208.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the foundation of anti-leftist sanctions and measures was laid under a Labour government. Clement Attlee, the British prime minister, announced on the floor of the House of Commons on March 15, 1948, that: "...A civil servant suspected of membership or association with the Communist Party or a Fascist organization in such a way as to raise legitimate doubts of his reliability, shall be summarily dismissed or transferred to less sensitive sector of the National parastatals."⁸

In an answer to a question during the debate, Attlee maintained that "Experience, both in this country and elsewhere, has shown that membership of, and other forms of continuing association with, the Communist Party may involve the acceptance by the individual of a loyalty, which in certain circumstances can be inimical to the State."⁹

Although acknowledging the difficulty of reading the minds of men, the prime minister maintained that "there is no way of distinguishing such people from those who, if

8. *TUC Annual Report 1948*, p 305, 532, TUC Collections, University of North London; *House of Commons Debate*, 448, March 15, 1948, pp 1703-1708; Rathbone, R. *Documents on the End of Empire – Ghana, Part II*, (HMSO – London, 1992), p 81.

9. *House of Commons Debate*, p 1703.

opportunity offered, would be prepared to endanger the security of the State in the interests of another Power."¹⁰ Suffice it to say that this policy applied to Communists and fellow-travellers, excluding Fabian-Socialists, who controlled the Labour Party. This gave the opposition (Conservatives) room for criticism, as they opined that Socialism is a transitory stage to Communism. They also criticized the government's secret trial of suspected Communists or fellow travelers maintaining that it was against democracy.¹¹

Such criticism did not stop Attlee and his cabinet from executing the policy. As he graphically noted: "I say that, owing to the fact that they have a different loyalty, they cannot serve the State."¹² By mid-1948, Sir W. Smithers, representing Orpington in the House of Commons, had called on the government "to take effective steps to outlaw Communism in this country," rather than what he called, "fiddling about with the Civil Service."¹³ And at the Annual Labour Party conference in 1948, a

10. Ibid, pp 1703-1704.

11. Ibid, pp 1704-1706; 3392-3398.

12. Ibid, p 3424.

13. Ibid, pp 1299-1300.

majority of the members present supported government action.¹⁴

Lord Vansittart again raised the matter on the floor of the House of Lords in March 1950. In his address titled "Communists in the Public Service," Lord Vansittart reiterated the government position and noted "continuous and resolute precautions are necessary for public security."¹⁵ Lord Milverton, formerly governor of Nigeria, supported him when he noted, "There is no room for Communism in the world."¹⁶ Some, however, were mild in their criticism of the communists. To the Earl of Iddlesleigh, "Communists are better left alone to continue their loud orations in order not to drive them underground."¹⁷

Despite their criticism of some aspects of the policy, the Conservative government also pursued anti-leftist policies. Keeping leftist ideology within bounds was seen as a step toward preserving democratic freedoms at Westminster. In the colonies, both nationalist and

14. *The Labour Party Annual Report 1947-1948* (London, 1949), p 208.

15. *House of Lords Report*, volume 166, no.10, March 29, 1950.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

labour leaders were expected to be wholeheartedly anti-leftist. Any suspicious act could reverse the course of development in the colonies as in the case of British Guiana in 1953.¹⁸

As Sir T. Lloyd (permanent under secretary, 1947-1956) noted: "Events in British Guiana have shown that their (Communists) tactics may take the form of building up and practicing Communism while denying that they are Communists, not only to the World at large but also to their own followers."¹⁹ He concluded that "A small minority of determined Communists will do everything to exercise the greatest possible influence and they will use that influence solely for the purposes of disruption. This is not a remote danger, but a very near one."²⁰

In West Africa, nationalist governments were encouraged to make policies aimed at curtailing Communism. Like Tafawa Balewa, K. Nkrumah also propped up some labour leaders as fronts in his anti-Communist crusade. He initiated the merger between the Gold Coast TUC and the

18. Rathbone, *British Documents*, p 79.

19. Ibid. Also CO554/371: Sir T. Lloyd to Sir C. Arden-Clarke, January 4, 1954.

20. Ibid.

Ghana TUC in order to place his supporters in advantaged positions in the new labor union.²¹

Nkrumah, however, did not succeed immediately in checking the activities of Communists such as C. Woode, Ocran, and G. Kumah in the new Ghana TUC that emerged.²² By early 1954, however, Nkrumah and his cabinet had succeeded in expelling known Communists such as Woode and Ocran from the CPP, as well as instituting the vetting procedure in civil service appointments. As Rathbone rightly concludes, "the adoption of these apparently draconian measures by the CPP dominated government was only partly intended to reassure the Conservative government in London."²³

By February 18, 1954, Oliver Lyttelton, the Colonial Secretary, informed the cabinet at Whitehall that the Gold Coast government under Nkrumah had taken the following steps: (1) "Ban the entry of all Communist literature into the Gold Coast," (2) "Exclude any European with Communist sympathies from the public service and exclude any African with Communist sympathies from a

21. Rathbone, *British Documents*, p 75.

22. Ibid. Also CO554/371: Sir C. Arden-Clarke to W. L. Gorell Barnes, December 4, 1953.

23. Rathbone, *British Documents*, p 82.

certain number of Departments like the Administration, the police and the Department of Education;" (3) "Confiscate the passports of the few Gold Coast Communists who wish to travel behind the Iron Curtain."²⁴

In Nigeria, it was recognised that the most effective prophylactic against leftist ideology was the education of the community as to its aims and objectives. Leftist ideology was not only opposed to the pace of decolonisation, but its ultimate goal of independence within the Commonwealth. In view of the leftists' in-roads into labour unions, the Council of Ministers noted that the greatest danger lay within organised labour.²⁵

On October 18, 1954, both Federal and Regional Governments took a step further in their anti-leftist measures when they finally resolved to place a ban on the employment of communists and their sympathisers in the public service. On October 19, 1954, J.O. Field, principal assistant secretary of the federation, and J.S. Dudding, senior assistant secretary for security and defense, addressed a press conference on government policy on

24. Ibid. Also PREM 11/1367: Cabinet Memorandum by Lyttelton, February 18, 1954.

25. CO537/6787: Macpherson to secretary of state.

leftist ideology.²⁶ A press statement was released, captioned "Council of Ministers Report"; it was published as "Government Notice No.1769: Statement of policy on the employment of communists in the public services." It read thus:

After careful examination of the situation in Nigeria and in other countries, particularly those in the British Commonwealth ... the Council of Ministers has reached the conclusion that steps are necessary to prevent the infiltration of active communists into posts in the service of the country in which divided loyalty might be dangerous to the interests of Nigeria. The first loyalty of a communist lies not to Nigeria, but to a foreign communist organisation, the objective of which is the political, economic and social subjugation of Nigeria. The Governments of Nigeria are therefore of the opinion that persons who are indoctrinated with communism should not be permitted to occupy posts in the service of Government in which it is possible for them to further the ends of the organisation to which they owe allegiance. It has therefore proved to the satisfaction of Government that active communists will in the future not be employed in

26 Ibid.

the following branches of the Nigerian Public Services: Administration, Education, Labour, Police, Posts and Telegraphs, Railway, Civil Aviation, or in certain key posts in other branches of the Public Services.²⁷

Both active Communists and their sympathisers in Nigeria were taken into consideration. Another point in the policy statement was the remark that employers of labor should also take steps to prevent communist penetration of the commercial sector.²⁸ During this period, about ten communists were identified as being in the public service, while not less than two hundred were said to be out of the public service.²⁹ Some newspapers' comments were favorable to the government's decision. An editorial in the *Daily Service* of October 16, 1954, captured the mood of the press. It noted that "Based on the past performances of Communists in non-communist countries, we fully endorse the principle outlined in the

27. *Daily Times* (Nigeria); *Daily Service* (Nigeria) and the *West African Pilot* of 20 October 1954. Also, "AMCONGEN, Lagos to the Department of State -Ban on employment of communist in Nigerian Public services," File 745H.14/10-2254, October 22, 1954, NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA.

28. *Federation of Nigeria Official Gazette*, No. 57, October 14, 1954 (Government Publishing House, Lagos, 1955).

29. *Ibid.*

statement, but we will add that other positive approaches must be made to combat the growth of communism. You may not give active communist job (sic), but that will not stop communism from growing. What will stop it is to carry out social programs that will build an educated public in a prosperous Country and will also eradicate social injustice. Communism thrives on ignorance and poverty."³⁰

To the *West African Pilot*, owned by Dr. N. Azikiwe, the best recipe against leftist ideology was not repression or persecution but rather the "application of a more powerful ideology which is based on moral goodness on the part of those who govern and those who are governed, thus leading ultimately to real existence of freedom of thought, speech or association."³¹

The success of the government's measures cannot be over-emphasized. As the American consul Herbert T. Krueger noted in January 1956, "The drastic decrease in the shipment of such propaganda, as compared to the 1953-early 1954 period, attests to the effectiveness of the ban on

30. See, *Daily Service* (Nigeria), 20 October 1954. For instance, in July 1957, the last colonial chief secretary in Nigeria reiterated that, "... this policy [anti-communism] has been followed voluntarily by a number of commercial organisations..." See, SO Osoba, "The Economic Foundations of Nigeria's Foreign Policy During the First Republic, 1960 – 1965," in IA Akinjogbin & SO Osoba, (eds.) *Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History* (Ile Ife, 1980), p 226.

31. *Daily Service*, 16 October 1954.

communist publications" and the employment of communists in the civil service.³²

Marxist leaders, both in Nigeria and Great Britain, felt the effect of this policy. The situation was not helped by deteriorating race relations between CPGB leaders and Nigerian members who had complained about "arrogance" among the leaders. The Nigerian government's ban on the employment of communists, announced in October 1954, further reduced the morale of some Nigerian members of the CPGB who had earlier thought about resigning from the body. As Adi rightly notes: "In 1954, the decline in membership was no doubt accelerated by an announcement by the Federal and Regional governments in Nigeria, that no known Communist would be employed in essential public service or in the civil service."³³

Meanwhile, at its meeting of December 29, 1954, the federal Council of Ministers took further action to ban communists from the public service by applying much the same screening methods that had been used at the University College, Ibadan, since 1951, for the appointment of Nigerians and expatriates in the public

32. *West African Pilot*, 15 October 1954.

33. Tijani, "McCarthyism in colonial Nigeria," p 652.

sector.³⁴ The measure included screening through the special force and police CID names of candidates for civil service jobs. In a conversation with the American consul-general McLaughlin, Azikiwe remarked that the measure had succeeded throughout the country and particularly in his area of control (Eastern Region).³⁵

In May 1955, the Eastern Region Ministry of Education circulated a notice to all private schools receiving government support to the effect that State funds would be withdrawn from those schools which continued to employ Communist teachers after December 31, 1955.³⁶ Awolowo also confirmed that the measure had succeeded in the Western Region and Lagos where most of the communists and their sympathisers lived and worked. Unlike Azikiwe, he added that the governments had been over zealous about the whole matter.³⁷

34. "Amcongen ... to D.O.S.; File 745H.001/1-656, p 2.

35. CO1039/34: Nigerian Council of Ministers Meeting, December 29, 1954, PRO, pp 12-14.

36. "McLaughlin to Department of State," File745H.00/6-155, June 1, 1956, NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA.

37. "Amcongen, Lagos to D.O.S. - East Bans Communist Teachers," File745H.00/6-155, June 1, 1955, NARA, College Park, USA.

Commercial Firms and Organised Labour

A leading labour leader once remarked that, "The initial and most embarrassing problem is that the workers are wont (sic) to look up to Communist and Communist influenced International Labour Organisations for material and financial aid... The psychological frailty and weakness of the average Nigerian worker, which - virtually - are engendered by want, insecurity and manumission, constitute the most fertile soil on which the baneful doctrine Communism thrives than ever."³⁸

The percentage of the Nigerian working class was put at 3 percent of the total population in 1954. An official figure indicates that there were 152,000 trade union members organised in 116 trade unions. Seven of the unions had more than 5,000 members. These were the Nigerian Union of Teachers (26,000); Amalgamated Union of the United Africa Company Workers Union (19,000); Public Utility Technical and General Workers Union of Nigeria and the Cameroons (12,000); Nigeria African Mineworkers Union

38. Mss292/File 966.3/6: Anunobi to Tewson, July 27, 1956, *TUC Registry Files*. Anunobi was the national secretary of Mercantile Unions of Nigeria and Cameroons during the period. He was a strong anti-Communist and influential labour leader.

(11,000); Railway Workers Union (11,000); and the Nigerian Civil Service Union (6,000).³⁹

As the figures show, a majority of Nigerian workers were employed by the colonial government, which thus gave them a key position to exercise pressure on British rule. To Nigerian Marxists, a trade union member should not stand aloof in the struggle against imperialism as practiced by the British. They seem to have imbibed the doctrine laid down by the CPGB leaders. As the CPGB leaders noted in one of their political ideological classes, "Non-political trade unionism is a betrayal of the interests of the workers and of the national struggle."⁴⁰ They, however, realised government's determined effort to keep "trade unions subservient to the employers and the Government, and to keep them isolated from the national struggle."⁴¹

Having noted that the sector of the society most vulnerable to leftist ideology was the labour and trade union, the government took three major steps in an effort to combat the menace. These were the training of labour

39 Nigeria - Department of Labour Annual Report 1954, (Lagos, 1955), NAI.

40 CP/CENT/INT/48/01: The Working Class Movement and the Need for a Marxist Party, 1954, NMLHA – Manchester, p 16.

41. Ibid.

and industrial officers; the encouragement of the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) instead of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU); and the encouragement of a pro-Western labour congress through the support of activists like Cole, Adebola, Borha, Adio-Moses, Porbeni, and Labinjoh.

The British colonial administration's effort at guiding and building trade unions and industrial relations in the colonies, however, predates East-West ideological differences. Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), the secretary of state for the colonies, in a dispatch to colonial governors in 1930 warned them "... to deal with trade unions with a spirit of tolerance and understanding." Regarding trade union development, he noted that "... there is a danger that, without sympathetic supervision and guidance, organisation of labourers without experience... may fall under the domination of disaffected persons, by whom their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends."⁴² This was the genesis of government intervention in molding labour unionism in the colonies.

42. "Hunt to the Department of State," File745H.11/00/11-2157, October 8, 1957, NARA.

The 1930s saw the appointment of a labour adviser to the secretary of state, the creation of labour inspectorates (later departments), and the appointments of trade union officers "to guide and train leaders in the art and practice of trade unionism" in the colonies.⁴³ These were some of the objectives of the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938. During the war, efforts of the inspector of labour in Nigeria, C.H. Crossdale, were aimed at nurturing the various unions for war needs and the maintenance of sound industrial relations between the government and European employers.⁴⁴ In fact, labour and welfare officers were often sent to sensitive government parastatals to act as the bridge between the government and its employees.⁴⁵

The Nigeria colonial government provided the lead by awarding scholarships to Nigerians to train at the University of London or under the British TUC. Between the late 1940s and 1952, eleven scholarships were awarded to

43. M Tokunboh, *Labour Movements in Nigeria: Past and Present* (Ibadan, 1985), pp 25-26.

44. Mss292/File 966.3/1: Nigeria, Correspondence/TU Development 1941-8, *TUC Registry File*, University of Warwick, Warwick, England.

45. *Ibid*

Nigerians in this respect.⁴⁶ The United States Foreign Leaders Grant was also made available in the training of some Nigerians in U.S. colleges and universities in labour and industrial relations. One of the first beneficiaries was Matthew Ayodele Tokunboh. Having benefited from the government scholarship during World War II to study at the London School of Economics, he was selected for the U.S. Leaders Grant to study labour and industrial relations at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He rose to the post of a labour officer by the late 1940s. Other beneficiaries included Adio-Moses, Beyioku, Cole, Olugbake, and Porbeni.⁴⁷

Between 1950 and 1960, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the University College, Ibadan, was charged with providing local courses/programs for future labour officers and unionists. This task was given to Ayodele Tokunboh, its first director (1950-1957). Although the literature used was provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, the British TUC, the British Council, the USIS, and

46. Tokunboh, *Labour Movements*, p 26; TUC Colonial Advisory Committee File 1, 1948-49, December 15, 1948, p 2; File 2, 1948-49, April 21, 1949, p 6, *TUC Collections*, University of North London. Other beneficiaries include: T. O. Sangonuga, A. F. A. Awolana, J. W. Wamuo and Abubakar Liman Umaru. See Mss292/File 966.3/4: Winterbottom to Curry, March 4, 1952, *TUC Registry Files*.

the Colonial Office, the participants at the departmental conference in 1953 advised that, "courses should not appear to have been sponsored, arranged, or unduly influenced by Government."⁴⁸ Also, session lecturers were invited to give lectures on trade unionism and industrial relations. These included Nancy Sears (LSE), W. Hood (British TUC), E. Hannah (US Trade Union official), G. McRay (Trade Union College, Kampala), and G. Paxton (British TUC).⁴⁹

In 1957 the Department of Labor also introduced "Training Within Industry" (TWI) courses in job instructions and job relations involving industrial relations, apprenticeship, training and factory organisation. And by 1959, the department had been assisted by H. Tulaz, of the British TUC, in establishing a trade union school in Lagos where courses were conducted in trade union and industrial relations.⁵⁰ While it is difficult to ascertain government success in this

47. Tokunboh, *Labour Movement*, p 26. Adio-Moses also benefited from the US Foreign Leader Program in 1951. See Mss292/File 966.3/2: Adio-Moses to Walter Hood, April 27, 1951, *TUC Registry Files*.

48. Ibid. See, *TUC Annual Report (London, 1953)*, p 212; *TUC Annual Report (London, 1956)*, p 215.

49. CO554/329: Departmental Labour Conferences, Nigeria 1953, PRO.

direction, one can say that it left no stone unturned in its desire to build pro-Western trade unions.

Another agent of government in its drive towards creating pro-Western trade unionists was the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU). As early as March 1949, Roberts Curry, the labour adviser in Nigeria, had written to Vincent Tewson, the British TUC secretary, concerning the activities of the WFTU in Nigeria and the need for TUC/ICTU initiatives. Curry noted that: "The W.F.T.U. will now be concentrating its energies on the backward countries and I have grave suspicions that Nigeria is one of the fertile grounds for their activities." He concluded that "The Government ... is very concerned about the matter and I am advising Government on the methods to combat this menace of Communism from spreading its ugly head amongst these simple people."⁵¹

Early in January 1950, J. Oldenboek, the general secretary of the ICTU, wrote to the secretary of state, Creech Jones, to support the visit of a panel of the ICTU to British territories in Central and West Africa later in

50. Tokunboh, *Labour Movements*, p 117.

51. Mss292/File 966.3/2: Curry to Tewson, March 23, 1949, *TUC Registry Files*.

the year.⁵² The primary motive was to assist in the development of free and democratic trade unions. At its executive board meeting of November 1950, it was resolved that the goal of the ICFTU was to wrest the initiative from the communists and communist-led trade unions, a goal to which it was prepared to devote substantial resources.⁵³ The British Trade Union Congress (TUC) and labour officers in Nigeria supported this move.⁵⁴ On November 20, 1950, Sir Vincent Tewson of the TUC wrote to the secretary of state for the colonies that the TUC would be holding a meeting with the ICFTU in Douala toward the end of January 1951 in order to prevent a similar plan by WFTU.⁵⁵

In view of its concern about communism in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia, the British TUC sent a six-person delegation to these countries, prior to the Douala conference, to study the level of communist penetration with the aim of detaching them from WFTU and

52. Tokunboh, *Labour Movements*, p 118.

53. CO537/6704: Oldenboek to James Griffiths, January 8, 1950, PRO, London.

54. Mss292/File 966.3/2: Extracts from letter received from G. B. Lynch, trade union officer, Labour Department, Lagos, Nigeria, January 21, 1950; Lynch to Tewson, May 16, 1950; *TUC Registry Files*.

55. Ibid. Cutting from *The Times* (London), 12 November 1950.

bringing them into the orbit of the ICFTU.⁵⁶ In fact, out of £250,000 raised to combat communism, the British TUC was said to have contributed a sum of £100,000.⁵⁷ The secretary of state for the colonies was delighted about the British TUC/ICFTU initiative since it was difficult for government to become directly involved in labour matters. Accordingly, administering officers, particularly in Nigeria where Eze's Labour Congress had affiliated with the WFTU, were directed to give every support to the delegation.⁵⁸

The response from Nigeria was very swift. Accommodation and transport were arranged at the expense of the Nigerian government. In order not to create fear in labour circles and to disguise its anti-WFTU motive from the labor movement, the government insisted that only the ICFTU and not the government would carry out publicity for the ICFTU visit.⁵⁹ The ICFTU/TUC trip from London was,

56. CO537/6704: Sir Vincent Tewson to S of S, James Griffiths, November 20, 1950.

57. Ibid.

58. See "Fortnightly Newsletter," File745H.00/2-2552, February 11-23, 1952, NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA.

59. CO537/6704: secretary of state for colonies to O.A.G of Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Gambia and Sierra Leone, December 5, 1950, PRO, London.

however, funded by the colonial office.⁶⁰ The endeavour was seen as an important stabilising influence on trade union movement that would provide valuable combat against leftist ideology infiltration into the movement.⁶¹

On February 15, 1951, the ICFTU delegation arrived in Nigeria to propagate the aims of free democracy. These included, verbatim: (1) To inform trade union groups of the purposes and aims of the ICFTU; (2) To obtain the maximum interests and support for the West African Trade Union Conference to be held at Douala between 26th and 28th February 1951; (3) To endeavour to win over groups at present supporting the communist-controlled WFTU; and, (4) To inform the ICFTU on labour conditions and the stage of trade union development in West Africa.⁶²

Although they had some difficulties, it seems, however, that they succeeded in most respects in Nigeria and indeed other British West African colonies.⁶³ The task of the ICFTU/TUC in combating leftist group in organised labour was to bolster the moderate and responsible

60. Ibid. O.A.G to S of S, December 16, 1950.

61. Ibid. Watson to Parry, January 13, 1951.

62. Ibid. James Griffiths to O.A.G (West Africa), January 16, 1951.

63. Ibid. ICFTU delegation to West Africa, 1950/1951, PRO, London. Also, Mss292/File 966.3/3: Extracts from report of visit to Nigeria by Mr.E. Parry, C.E. Ponsonby and Dalgleish, to James Griffith, July-August 1950, *TUC Registry Files*,

elements in colonial labour unions. It was also to encourage the production of more leaders opposed to WFTU interference. The first step in this direction was the setting up of an Information and Advice Center in Accra, which became a regional office of the body.⁶⁴ A second significant effort of the ICFTU during this period was its support for the Adio-Moses, Borha, Adebola, and Esua groups in their efforts to establish a pro-Western trade union. Despite Nduka Eze's attempt at bargaining for financial assistance as a prelude to withdrawing his section of the union's affiliation with the WFTU, the ICFTU delegation under Fred Dalley of the British TUC was only willing to assist Adio-Moses' group. It is not surprising that Adio-Moses, E. Cowan, and A. Cole were selected to represent Nigeria at the Douala meeting.⁶⁵ Adio-Moses later offered a motion at the Douala meeting on March 7, 1951 that the ICFTU should establish regional machinery for the coordination of trade union training in West and Central Africa, including the establishment of trade union colleges and the promotion of lectures. These

64. *West Africa*, Editorial, London, January 27, 1951; Colonial Advisory Committee Minute (CACM), File 2 (1950-51), February 21, 1951, p 7; File 3, May 10, 1951, p 9-11; File 4, September 21, 1951, p 13; *TUC Annual Report* 1952, p 174.

proposals were adopted and machinery was set in motion to counter the communist influence in labour movements.⁶⁶

By the end of 1951, Adio-Moses - with the assistance of Cowan, Borha, and Cole - had been able to gain some ground within the Nigerian labour movement.⁶⁷ An action committee was set up under Adio-Moses through which the conference recommendations were carried out. The "Action Committee" or "The Council of Action" as it was variously referred to in the TUC record, aimed at (1) Formation of a democratic national center; and, (2) Building up of branches similar to British TUC/ICFTU unions.⁶⁸ One step toward achieving these goals was the setting up of trade union educational committees and mini-libraries at trade union secretariats in major parts of the country, with books supplied by the TUC.⁶⁹

65. See A Carew, "Charles Millard, A Canadian in the International Labour Movement: A Case Study of the ICFTU 1955-1961," *Labour/Le travail* 37 (spring 1996), pp 121-148.

66. CO537/6704: Smith to Gorsuch, April 2, 1951, PRO, London.

67. Ibid. Adio-Moses was appointed as a labor officer in the Western Region in 1958.

68. Mss292/File 966.3/2: Nigeria 1948-51, Walter Hood to Curry, May 7, 1951; *TUC Registry Files*.

69. Mss292/File 966.3/4: Nigeria 1951-53, *TUC Registry Files*; Couzens to Barltrop, November 20, 1951.

It should be noted that Adio-Moses had been one of the beneficiaries of TUC scholarships as far back as 1947. Based on the advice of the TUC Colonial Advisory Committee, the general council offered him a scholarship to study trade unionism and industrial relations at Ruskin College, Oxford. Adio had earlier benefited from the TUC Educational Trust Fund, which enabled him to spend some time attending meetings, lectures and conferences in England.⁷⁰ In addition, there were beneficiaries from other parts of the British colonies during the period.

Activities of the ICFTU were felt in all parts of colonial Africa (and indeed in independent African states) during the period. Apart from its regional office in Accra, which published *Africa Labour* (known later as *Labour Africa Survey*), conferences and lectures were organized from time to time to ensure a democratic trade unionism on the continent. One such conference was the All-African Conference on trade unionism held at Accra between January 14 and 18, 1956. According to the organisers, it was part of initiatives toward combating

70. *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston) had earlier reported that the basic drive of the ICFTU initiatives "is for free labor group." See July 2, 1956 edition. Also, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1956; TUC Annual Report 1957.

the leftist ideology or any WFTU activities in Africa.⁷¹

The opening of the Labour College at Kampala, Uganda, in November 1958 complemented this.⁷²

In addition to the offer of scholarships to colonial trade unionists, the TUC general council assisted colonial trade union movements in the provision of educational facilities for their members in the form of Ruskin College correspondence courses. These were made available to trade unionists in the West Indies, West Africa, Burma and Malaya, with the TUC meeting the cost.⁷³ The TUC also supported extra-mural courses at the London School of Economics and Political Science, as it did for the Ruskin College, Glasgow, Southampton, and Manchester Universities.⁷⁴ The essence was to aid government efforts in building sound industrial relations and labour unions as a step toward combating leftist menace.

Between 1946 and 1952, seventeen Nigerians benefited from TUC training facilities for overseas trade unionists. Of the fifty-two places in the general training courses

71. *African Labour*, no.5, January 1959,p 2.

72. *TUC Annual Report 1950*, p 155.

73. *TUC Annual Report 1951*, p 223.

since its inception in 1946/47, twelve were allotted to Nigeria, nine to Germany, six to India, four to the West Indies, three to Norway and Trinidad, two to Burma and Sierra Leone, and one each to the Gold Coast, Kenya, British Guiana, Malaya, Australia, Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Southern Rhodesia, Kenya, and Holland.⁷⁵

The private sector was not left out in the overall attempts to curtail leftist ideology in the colonies generally. European firms were generally apprehensive of communist infiltration of their workers' unions. In England, they formed a pressure group called the Overseas Employers Federation. Through this organisation they were able to press for more official sanctions against any form of leftist ideology. These included Bank of British West Africa Limited, Barclays Bank (D.C.O), British and French Bank, John Holt, Rowntree-Fry-Cadbury, UAC, Elder Dempster, and Peterson Zochonis.⁷⁶ They cooperated with the labour department and the British TUC on ways to build sound industrial and labour relations.

74. *TUC Annual Report 1952*, p 154.

75. *TUC Annual Report 1954*, p 228.

76. Mss292/File 966.3/6: Nigeria - Background notes for meeting with Overseas Employers, February 1956, *TUC Registry Files*.

In response to Lyttelton's request of December 9, 1953, for cooperation between the CO and the TUC, the TUC General Council met with government officials on January 28, 1954, to work out modules of operation. It was agreed that private firms had a part to play in the development of good industrial relations. To that end, it was suggested that the colonial office should meet the representatives of the Overseas Employers Federation. This was to be followed by a meeting between the three bodies.⁷⁷

In a meeting in 1954 between the OEF, the CO, and the British TUC, it was agreed that steps against leftist ideology in colonial labour unions should remain secret.⁷⁸ In a response to A. Mellor, the director of the United Africa Company, the secretary of state for the colonies stressed however that "while it was communism which made the job so urgent...communism itself could only be met by developing sound industrial relations."⁷⁹

77. CO537/6704: Smith to Gorsuch.

78. D Goldsworthy, (ed.) *British Documents on the end of Empire: The Conservative Government and the End of Empire - Part III*, (HMSO: London, 1994), p 374.

79. Ibid.

Leading commercial firms in Nigeria, such as the Lever Brothers, the Leventis Group, John Holt Ltd, the United Africa Company, Van Der Bergh, and Elder Dempster, supported government anti-Communist measures through their disposition to notable Marxist labour leaders. For instance, the management of Lever Brothers and Van Der Bergh did not recognise Wahab Goodluck as the representative of their workers' union during a trade dispute in 1957 partly because he was tagged a communist.⁸⁰

During the talks with the commissioner of labour, management stated categorically "all we had done was to prevent a communist from causing industrial chaos by being allowed unrestricted access to our premises."⁸¹ The management of Lever Brothers and Van Der Bergh sought the support of the government in upholding their decision to restrict Goodluck and his cohorts from their premises, since, in their view, "government was serious in its declared attitude towards communism."⁸²

80. CO554/1998: Labour Matters in Nigeria, 1957-1959, PRO, London. Also, *West African Pilot*, February 18, 1949.

81. Ibid.

82. CO554/1998: Labour Matters.

The director of Elder Dempster Lines Limited, Bruce Glasier, was also concerned about the activities of Wari Orumbie (a.k.a. Sidi Omar Khayam), who was believed to have the backing of a Trotskyite group in Liverpool, to disrupt cordial labour relations between staff and management of Elder Dempster in Lagos.⁸³ The background to this was the seamen's strike on board the *M.V. Apapa* at Liverpool in 1957 and the subsequent dismissal of the workers by the management of Elder Dempster.⁸⁴

By November 1958, Orumbie had successfully staged a walkout in Lagos, which disrupted the activities of the company. Elder Dempster's tactics were to sponsor other workers to disrupt the activities of Orumbie. In this the company was successful.⁸⁵ To the government, however, the most plausible counter to leftist group and organisations was the building of sound industrial relations between management and the workers.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. Also, see "labour disputes on the *M.V. Apapa*, 1957-1959," PRO, London; "Board of Inquiry into the Trade Dispute Between the Elder Dempster Lines Limited and the Nigerian Union of Seamen Report, 1959," Government Publications, Lagos, 1959. A special thanks to Ms. Powell, State Department Library, Washington DC, for sending a copy to me.

85. Ibid. Also, "AMCONGEN to the Department of State - Labor dispute involving W. O. Goodluck, secretary of Lever Brothers and Van Der Bergh workers' union," File 845H.062/7-3158, July 31, 1958, NARA; *Daily Times* (Nigeria), July 19, 1958; and *West African Pilot*, July 23, 1958.

Further government attempts at eliminating leftists' gain, if any, can be seen in their fostering of the National Council of Trade Unions, Nigeria (NCTUN) under Cole in 1957.⁸⁶ The background was N. Watson's memorandum of 1953 where he argued "it is no use trying to break communist leaders if there is nobody to step into their places."⁸⁷ He maintained that "quite apart ... from any repressive or deterrent action in the administrative, legal or propaganda fields that H.M.G. or Colonial Governments may be able to take, the fact will always remain that resistance to communist infiltration must come from within the trade union movement itself."⁸⁸ As the secretary of state for the colonies summed it up "it is by influence and persuasion that the work would have to be done."⁸⁹

86. "AMCONGEN to the Department of State - Status of ANTUF/NCTUN struggle for control of Nigerian Trade Union Movement," File 845H.062/6-2658, June 26, 1958, NARA.

87. CO859/748: Communism in the Colonial Territories and the Trade Unions - Memorandum by N.D. Watson, November 9, 1953.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid. Draft CO record of a discussion between Mr. Lyttelton and the representatives of the TUC and the Overseas Employers Federation, July 12, 1954. Influence and persuasion had been used to resolve the Malaya labor crises earlier in 1954. As the secretary of state for the colonies noted in the draft, "the situation in Malaya had been extremely dangerous a little time ago but the talks which had taken place with Mr. Narayanon and Mr. Ascoli were largely responsible for the happy outcome..."

Like Nkrumah in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Balewa's government secretly sponsored activists like Labinjoh, Adebola, and Borha to join the leftists dominated All-Nigerian Trade Union Federation (ANTUF).⁹⁰ The return of these men to the ANTUF led to the resignation of Gogo Chu Nzeribe and his cohorts from the body and the temporary declaration of ANTUF support for ICFTU.⁹¹ But for Adebola this was not enough, the goal of the ICFTU at the Douala meeting was not to create another faction in the ANTUF but "to clean out the minority communist group and preserve ANTUF."⁹²

The argument was that irrespective of the resignation of Nzeribe and his cohorts, Wahab Goodluck and Sunday Bassej still held official positions that could only be wrested from them only through an election. The solution, according to Adebola, was that "ANTUF must be completely dissolved; a new center probably reverting to the old name of Nigerian Trade Union Congress, would be formed with the NCTUN as the nucleus; and membership would be considered individually and no union harboring known pro-Communist

90. "Labor: Further developments in Nigerian Trade Union Movement," File 845H.06/8-2057, August 20, 1957.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

elements in its executive would be eligible for affiliation."⁹³

These machinations soon paid dividends. On March 7, 1959, approximately one hundred and fifty labor leaders representing seventy unions met at Enugu, Eastern Region, to organise a new trade union organization. With the exception of M. Imoudu, who was elected president-general of the new Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), all of the officers of the new organisation had been previously closely associated with NCTUN (an anti-leftist group).⁹⁴ L. Borha, who defeated S. Bassey, secretary-general of ANTUF, by eighty-five votes to fifty-two, captured the important position of secretary-general.⁹⁵ The deputy president-General elect was S.I. Eze, president of the Nigerian Transport Staff Union affiliate of NCTUN. O. Zudonu was elected first vice-president, and O. Egwunwoke as treasurer. The former was president, and the latter, secretary of the Marine Floating Staff Union, which was affiliated with NCTUN. It should be noted that both men

93. Ibid.

94. "AMCONSUL, Lagos to D.O.S.: Conference of Nigerian labor leaders creates new national organization," File 845H.06/3-2359, March 23, 1959, NARA.

95. Ibid. Also, EO Egbah, "Central Trade Unionism in Nigeria (1941-1966)," *Geneve Afrique*, vi, no.2, (1967).

had earlier visited the United States and Caux (Switzerland) as strong supporters of the Moral Re-armament Movement.⁹⁶

To achieve this sweep of important offices in the TUC, supporters of NCTUN are said to have caucused both before and during the merger and adopted a common policy.⁹⁷ As Theo Adams, the American consul, noted, "an internal split among ANTUF representatives to the conference combined with an apathy toward ANTUF on the part of the regional leaders defeated their aspirants."⁹⁸ The *Daily Times*, in its editorial of March 11, 1959, remarked that "the new TUC must look into the past and learn from the pitfalls of its predecessor, the old TUC" under Nduka Eze.⁹⁹ In the final analysis, the constitution of the new TUC categorically stated as one of the objectives of the new labour movement "it will safeguard against the projection of communism into the labor movement."¹⁰⁰

96. "AMCONSUL, Lagos to D.O.S.: Conference of Nigerian Labor Leaders."

97. CP/CENT/INT/20/01: The N.E.P.U. Party of Northern Nigeria - Declaration of Principles, n.d. NMLHA.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

The Role of Major Political Parties

Ideological questions did not emerge in party politics and the wider nationalist movement in Nigeria until 1944, when the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons was formed. Although the Marxists were unable to make NCNC a Communist-oriented organisation, its efforts, thenceforth, were aimed at achieving strategic positions within the party. To the NCNC, a Communist Party of Nigeria that preached violence had no right to exist. The party opted for gradualism and a constitutional route to independence, in opposition to the radicals' idea of violent liberation.¹⁰¹

In addition, the Action Group and the Northern People's Congress were anti-Communist in orientation and structure. This, perhaps, was based upon their significant support from traditional institutions. Both the AG and the NPC first emerged as cultural associations called "Egbe Omo Oduduwa" and "Jamatul Islamiyyah Arewa," respectively, in the late 1940s. They, however, became political parties in 1951. To the Marxists, both parties were conservative

100. *Daily Times* (Nigeria), 11 March 1959.

101. "Constitution of Trade Union Congress of Nigeria," File 845H.062/6-3059, June 30, 1959, NARA, College Park, Maryland. "ICFTU Collections: HD6868 - Nigeria (General)," *TUC Collections*; "Superior Strategy Defeats Communist Plan - Nigerian

and could not serve their purpose (a base for militant leftist action). However, this view about the Action Group later changed in the 1960s. By and large, the AG and NPC membership was made up of politicians who had been schooled in the virtues of capitalism and communism. While most opted for capitalism and Fabian socialism, some who had earlier been associated with the CPGB in London, renounced communism upon returning to Nigeria. These were barristers, businessmen, teachers, and aristocrats. Both parties were manifestly interested in anti-leftist ideology as part of the decolonisation process.

In view of the government's stiff opposition to leftist organisations, some of the Marxists (Eze group) had, by the mid-1950s, decided to join registered political parties. There was, however, a dilemma among the Marxist groups concerning which of the political parties they should join. A majority of them, however, preferred the Action Group. Sklar identified four reasons for this. First, the left had recently suffered set-backs due to Azikiwe's anti-Communism; second, they were impressed by the organisation and methodical planning of the Action Group; Third, their membership was concentrated in the

T.U. Movement Finds Unity," *MRA Information Service, vol.8, no.193* (1959) Caux, Switzerland, *TUC Registry Files*.

West; and fourth, they preferred AG's federalism to the NCNC's preference for a unitary system.¹⁰² They were also attracted to the Action Group because of its soft spot for socialist intellectuals, whom it used in its "summer school" programs. The AG used the "summer school" to teach party aims, activities, and strategies. Thus between 1952 and 1960 the Action Group repeatedly made known its preference for free enterprise and welfarism. To Awolowo, these included free education, health services, full employment and unemployment relief, as well as support and encouragement of peasant farmers.¹⁰³

Ideological questions in the North are better understood by explaining the attitude of the NPC to opposition parties such as the Northern Elements People's Party (NEPU) and other minorities. The NPC leadership under Ahmadu Bello did not mince words in its stiff opposition to leftist ideology and its micro-organisations in Nigeria.¹⁰⁴ This explains his attitude toward socialists and radicals in the Northern Region during the period. Examples of radicalism include opposition to the native

102. R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, 1963), p 270.

103. Ibid, pp 270-271.

authority system in any form. An example of socialist ideology includes NEPU's declared principle of resuscitating the role of the "Talakawa" in politics. In fact, the North's native authority was the NPC and vice versa. Thus, opposition to the NA system meant opposition to the NPC. Aminu Kano perceptively summed up the situation thus: "We interpret democracy in its more traditional, radical sense, and that is the rule of the common people, the poor, the illiterate, while our opponents (the NPC) interpret it in its modern Tory sense, and that is the rule of the enlightened and prosperous minority in the supposed interest of the common people."¹⁰⁵

Aminu Kano's position, according to Dudley, "provided the middle-class led opposition with a radical, revolutionary ideology which drew its inspiration from Marxian concepts."¹⁰⁶ Unlike Marxists in the South, the NEPU under Kano aimed at restructuring the fabric of Northern society and propagated the need for wider political and economic opportunities based upon meritocracy rather than ascription.¹⁰⁷ Dudley described

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid. Also see, A Feinstein, *African Revolutionary: The Life and Times of Nigeria's Aminu Kano* (London, 1992).

106. BJ Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria* (London, 1968), p 169.

NEPU's ideology as "the building up of the economy on socialist lines, which the party interprets to mean the conversion of villages into co-operatives and the gradual nationalisation of some assets."¹⁰⁸ The NPC, like the NCNC, did not tolerate socialism and any opposition to aristocracy preached by NEPU and other minority groups in the North.¹⁰⁹ As it was in the South, there was no place for the Marxists in the North. Unlike the southern parties, however, the NPC did not accept radicals into its fold even if they were willing to shed their "red garments."¹¹⁰

Conclusion

By the late 1950s, Britain, with the assistance of leading Nigerian politicians, had been able to stall the development of a nationwide Marxist organisation in Nigeria. It also established practical policies on sociopolitical and economic development as well. It

107. R Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, p 372.

108. BJ Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria* (London, 1968), p 169.

109. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, pp 366-376; Dudley *Parties and Politics*, p 169. Also see, J N Paden, *Ahmadu Bello - Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria* (London, 1986).

110. See Dudley, *Parties and Politics*; and A. Feinstein, *African Revolutionary*, for full discussion.

succeeded in winning the hearts and souls of many Nigerians, as in most of its colonies before granting independence. More importantly, it laid the foundation for sustaining measures and policies used in preventing Leftists in-road into public and private sectors in Nigeria. Emergent leaders in a post-independent Nigeria were also anti-leftist a-la Westminster in all ramifications. Thus the continuation of a pro-Western structure, ideals, and anti-leftist measures should not be surprising.