

Unpopular Essays

Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was easily the most colourful thing that happened to this country at "independence" in October, 1960. In consequence the man's inauguration as the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Federation of Nigeria, was celebrated with due noise.

Inspired by his country men's generous show of goodwill, Dr Azikiwe went to town on the promises of independence. "Representative democracy" he said, "has been tried in Nigeria and it has worked successfully. Parliamentary government has been attempted in Nigeria and we have proved more than equal to the task. Ministerial responsibility is no longer a bugbear to us; it is now part and parcel of our politics. Indeed, the Westminster model of parliamentary government and democracy has been proved by us, not only to be capable of being exported to Africa, but practicable in this part of Africa.

"But these are veneers of a political pattern which is interwoven on

It is here too that we will discover that economic considerations serve

jobs in the lower colonial civil service; political participation was restricted to a few urban elites because populist politics was considered dangerous to the imperialist order.

Later, when the dynamics of social change made it inevitable that colonialism should end, the colonial powers (in most cases) took steps to "prepare" their subjects for "independence." Since the primary motive behind colonialism was economic, it was important that political independence should not dis-



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companies which were the major patrons of the foreign-owned advertising departments internally where they employed the agencies' expatriates. So that, when the time came to sell the advertising business to Nigerians, only the buildings and equipments were sold, not the market.

This foreign control of the economy is experienced everywhere. In 1971, lawyer Gani Fawehinmi alleged that "the 15 expatriate lawyers in Nigeria (six from Lagos, one from Ibadan, seven from Kano and one from Jos) control among them, the retainers of all the principal companies and firms in the country which substantially control our economy".

Independence should change all this. The commanding heights of the economy will have to be wrested from foreign control and nationalised. Otherwise we cannot have independence.

So, with J. V. Clinton, we argue, that tomorrow's celebration can only be meaningful if we consider that the occa-

Is Nigeria Independent?

a complex social system in a world of which Nigeria is a part. Whilst Nigeria can definitely give assurance of its capacity for self-government and to maintain law and order, as a fully fledged member of the Commonwealth, Nigerians are bound to criticise the scandalous inconsistencies of certain nations in their attitude towards the darker races."

That was Azikiwe, eloquent and impressive, enthusiastic beyond the point of reason. Today, a decade and a half later, Nigerians no longer debate whether or not the Westminster model is suitable for the country..... the answer is too obvious. Rather, the relevant question has become whether we really have independence. And if the answer is yes, whether independence has been worth it... considering the enormous price we have all paid thus far.

To answer that question, we cannot escape asking another. What do we expect from independence? Or better still, what should we expect from it? We shall, however precede the answer to this question with a brief history of colonialism as it affects us. This is because we can hardly explain anything relating to our nationhood out of the context of colonialism.

as the vital element in determining the degree of independence of a country.

Nigeria, its social and economic structures, and to a large extent, its politics, are in a sense,

rupt the existing economic order.

An African middle-class was hurriedly constructed and isolated from the masses. The European bourgeoisie, Marx wrote, "compels all

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products of Europe's industrial revolution of the 19th century. A radical change in the method of production, from handicraft to the use of machines had invested European countries with a phenomenally increased industrial capacity. The new situation called for a corresponding increase in raw materials and market size.

The nascent middle-class (the bourgeoisie) carried out an intensive exploration of hitherto-unknown parts of the world, discovering new lands. The new lands later provided fodder for the new factories in Europe. Fodder in terms of labour and raw materials. This was the age of imperialism when everything in the colonies was organised for systematic exploitation. Education was geared towards filling white-collar

nations, on the pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, that is, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image."

This was the Nigeria that emerged at "independence." The British transferred political power to a carefully-embroidered middle-class and continued to run the country by some remote control. An if they were looking for any assurance of their success in this direction, Dr Azikiwe was at hand to offer one. "The Westminster model of parliamentary government and democracy has been proved by us, not only to be capable of being exported to Africa, but practicable in this part of Africa...."

But what should we really expect from independence means we have come "to be formed into a nation with democratic will and a constitutional way of expressing that will" but lamented that in the first republic, "political parties were able to corrupt the constitution so that the true will of the people did not prevail".

Independence should also mean that we control our economy. The indigenisation effort of

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the last regime was an eye-wash. The cornerstone of the Nigerian economy are banking and insurance. These were left out of the exercise. Even then, as many foreign-owned companies as wanted exemption from the exercise got it. Others simply short-circuited the whole thing. An example is the Advertising and Public Relations industry. The foreign

sion is important for our "good intentions for the future and the fact that we are being given a second chance".

Meanwhile, insofar as we define independence against our colonial past; for as long as we retain the economic, technical and cultural forms we inherited from that colonial experience, we cannot be considered independent. Independence, properly so called.