

- by P. A. Curtis Joseph

I read with very keen interest the conversation with Chief Jonathan Odebiyi on pages 6, 7 and 9 of ^{THE} GUARDIAN on Saturday 12, October 1996 and I would like to make some comments *and corrections*.

Unlike the vituperations of Chief Bola Ige in his interview with TEMPO pages 8, 9 and 10 of February 2, 1996 and SUNDAY PUNCH of August 11, 1996 pages 10 and 11 in connection with his (Ige's) controversial book "People, politics and politicians of Nigeria, 1940-1979", Senator Odebiyi talked without bitterness and with maturity of mind. Though there is no way a former member or supporter of the Action Group will explain the incident of 1951/52 without fumbling.

While Ige said in the February TEMPO interview that the 1951/52 election was on a non-party basis and that Zik and the Pilot (West African Pilot) lied that the NCNC won the election in the Western Region, Chief Odebiyi when ^{asked} the question about Zik being deprived the fruit of the success of the NCNC in that (1951) election said: "I don't know, as I said I was not around when they held the first meeting of the House of Assembly". He did not say it was a non-party election, but he was not being sincere by claiming ignorance because he was not in the country.

On the question of Zik being denied the chance of going to the Federal House of Representatives, Ige confirmed that it was through regional electoral college system that members were chosen to go to the House of Representatives. The NCNC voted for Zik and H. P. Adebola to go to the Federal House, but things happened at Ibadan and the Action Group used its stolen majority to vote for Adedoyin and Adebola, persuading Adedoyin not to step down for Zik with the tribal argument that he (Zik) should have gone to the East because he was an

Ibo man. Ige admits this in the TEMPO interview.

Replying to a question about this incident in the recent conversation in THE GUARDIAN, Chief Odebiyi put it this way: "...three regions were created by the Constitution. Lagos was part of the West and Zik penetrated through Lagos. There was NCNC in the East. So if you like, you can say that when the country was divided into three tribal regions, there was tribal constitution in operation because we could have had a single house. We were opting for a Federal Constitution and Federal Constitution allows for the indigenes of an area to practise their own culture. The Yoruba culture is basically on this side, Fulani culture is in the North. Igbo culture is in the East. We had an election, that election favoured certain people in the North in the East and in the West. So you wanted a situation in which Zik would have controlled the East and controlled the West. The culture of the East is quite different from the culture of the West. What would then be the connection between the West and the East? We could have met easily at the top".

Chief Odebiyi further said: "Zik as a national figure should not have gone to the East or West for that matter. He should have stayed put in the Federal Parliament. At that stage, he was a nationalist, so he said, and I believe that was what he wanted to be. So it would have been better to meet at the centre. But he left a surrogate in the East (Michael Opara) and decided to come to the West. How would it sound?" Here you see a real muddle. Here you see the beginning of how the most educationally advanced Yoruba people who spread all over Nigeria and the Cameroons in commerce and all branches of employment, public and private, fell flat for British imperialist design which has dragged the nation into the mess we are in today.

The National Council of Nigerian and the Cameroons (NCNC) founded in 1944 by Nigerian Students Union cut across

tribe, region, religion and culture. Its first President was Herbert Macaulay. When the Richard's constitution was introduced the NCNC came out vigorously in opposition to it, especially the ordinances about lands, appointment and deposition of chiefs, and most importantly the division of the country into the three unequal parts that would always make the North larger in land mass and population than the South and giving each the tribal tag of Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo.

When Chief Odebiyi talks of culture, none of the three regions had the monolithic or monolingual culture of the tribal tag placed on it. In the North you had the once powerful Kanuri people who once had a Bornu empire later split by colonialists into three with one part left in Nigeria. There were people of the middle belt, the Nupes, the Yorubas, the Gwaris and a host of others with their different languages and cultures. In the West you had the Edos, the overlord of once great Bini Kingdom and other groups with their different languages and cultures. So it was in the East. There were the republican Ibos, the monarchical Ibos and Calabars, Ibibios and many others with different languages and cultures.

The NCNC mobilised a nationalist struggle against this mischievous set up in the Richard's constitution which Chief Odebiyi accepted was tribal. The three only elected Lagos NCNC members in the Legislature in 1946 boycotted the inauguration and joined in the nation-wide campaign. The NCNC delegation on a countrywide tour headed by Herbert Macaulay first headed for the North. It returned to base when the leader Herbert Macaulay, fell sick in Kano. After his death on 7/5/46 and burial on 11/5/46 the delegation, now led by Zik who succeeded Herbert Macaulay as President, toured the whole country and

collected money and mandates to carry out the struggle to the colonial office in London in 1947.

Members of the delegation of seven were Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader, Adeleke Adedoyin and Dr. Olorun-nimbe, representing Lagos and the West, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, representing women, Bukar Dipeharima representing the North, Chief Nyong Essien representing the East and P. M. Kale representing the Cameroons. Tribalism reared its ugly head in London. British intelligence went to work through same Yorubas who were students in London then and members of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed in London in 1945 with the knowledge and blessing of the colonial office. By the time the NCNC was to be received in audience by the colonial secretary, Adedoyin and Olorun-nimbe defected. It was a terrible blow to the campaign. ~~saying an Ibo man would not lead them.~~

The colonial secretary had to "advise" Zik, now leading a divided delegation, to go back home and co-operate with the Government. That ended the 3-man boycott of the legislature, and Zik tried many times to introduce a Bill against tribalism in any form without success. It was heckling and bullying everytime, like what happened in the last constitutional conference. Members, except the three, were nominated to the Legislature by the Governor.

This is the treachery by Adedoyin and Olorun-nimbe in London against ~~the~~ nationalist tribal and unequal regionalisation was settled and forgiven campaign was later settled and ^{they} were pardoned by the NCNC. But it resurfaced again when Zik was prevented from going to the Federal House in 1952. When tribal jingoists were fooling around, the British knew who they were going to hand over the Government. While supporting the formation of Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1945, Tafawa Balewa was quietly being groomed same year in London. They must prevent Zik from coming to the Federal House where he would have been easily voted for. That was the situation in 1952.

The West and East were solidly for NCNC, and the North was for NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union). As the NCNC was rigged out of success in the West, the success of NEPU in the North was changed by a very different method. That was in 1951/52. NCNC plan was to win in East and West and, with its ally NEPU in the North and some nationalist minded Northerners ~~could have voted to get Zik in the centre.~~ *and change the constituency* The British knew this and frustrated it. While the NCNC was formed in 1944, the NEPU in 1945 and the Action Group in 1950, the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress) came into being in the Northern House of Assembly, masterminded by colonial civil servants and swallowed the NEPU success in the election.

For those who held that we would meet at the top, who then reached the top? It was Balewa. *that the Government* ~~By the time Zik was~~ *allowed* to reach the top a golden cage had been prepared for him as a representative of the Queen. ~~And Government of Nigeria was handed over to Abubakar Tafawa Balewa by~~ *lowered* midnight 1st October 1960. The Union Jack was ~~covered~~ and the green white green Nigerian flag was raised. There was fire works. *There was no speech. It was like saying: "hold this for me, I will soon come back."* ~~But no speech of acceptance.~~ Chief Odebiyi muddled up everything when he said Zik "left a surrogate in the East (Michael Opara) and decided to come to the West." Zik left for the East in 1956 where he was Premier until he became a ceremonial head of state in 1960 a non-political office. How did surrogate Michael Opara come into the 1951/52 confusion in the West? To make matters worse Chief Odebiyi is reported as further saying: "How would it sound? No, tell me how would it sound? You see charity begins at home. Even then it shows the unparalleled trace of the Yoruba man that an Igbo could aspire to be Premier in the West. Which Yoruba man could have stood up to such in the East?"

It baffles me that Chief Odebiyi can still think and speak

like this in October 1996. An Hausa man was once Mayor of

Enugu. *At that same period, a Yoruba man was*

That apart, what is the position in Nigeria today? mayor of Lagos in the person of Dr Olorun-runde
What is the position now in the former Western Region of who was deposed by a Yoruba led Government
1951/52 now carved into eight states? What is the cultural of Western Region ^{now a group} abolished Mayoralty
affinity between the individual states and the states of origin in Lagos. What is the position today. The Western of their individual Administrators? Lagos started ballot box
Region of 1951/52 has been carved into eight states and political party elections since the early twenties. My none of which has an indigene as Administrator
heart was sore when I saw television pictures of recent non-

party head count like cattle, named elections.

For the first time in Nigerian history, a Yoruba man won a Nigerian nation-wide presidential election in 1993 cutting across states, religion, tribe and ideology. He is languishing in jail and his businesses are either completely paralysed or limping. There was a Sir Oswald Ernald Mosley, a British politician who formed and led the British Union of Fascists in the thirties. He opposed and campaigned vigorously against the war with Hitler Germany. Under defence Regulations he was arrested and imprisoned in 1941. But was released on health grounds in 1943. That was war time. M. K. O. Abiola is sick in prison. His wife Kudirat was killed. His Press with bussiness premises shut down and workers made jobless for months. Nine Supreme Court Justices took his Press to court claiming fifty million naira each, (strange and unprecedented) for libel. Ha, Nigeria, Ha, Yoruba, Ha, Ibo, Ha, Hausa.

Chief Odebiyi says Dikko is ignorant. But Dikko, a fugitive returned at Government expense and has been talking recklessly. He walks free. Akinloye, his co-fugitive, had been detained for talking politics modestly. Where is Chief Odebiyi's centre of 1951/52.

Do we lack the hind-sight, insight and the foresight to perceive correlation between the events of 1951-1960 and events

from June 1993 (still going one)? Perhaps people who should know did not know and have not known that, Abiola, for daring to originate the campaign for reparation for what the blacks suffered in slavery, he treaded heavily on the toes of successors of the slave traders. And when the television debate between him and Tofa took place and the question of oil price came up, you would know that Abiola had a grasp of national and international oil politics. I told people around me that he would win the election and his presidency would have some serious problems. I never thought of annulment at all.

Let those that have ears, hear; those who have eyes, see; those whose thinking faculty has become faulty and rusty should wake up that Nigeria economic collapse which will take years to revive through complete foreign take over.

P. A. Curtis Joseph
P. O. Box 2078
Shomolu, Palm Grove
Lagos

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