

The 1945 General Strike in Northern Nigeria and its Role in Anti-Colonial Nationalism

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ABSTRACT

This thesis follows the course of the Nigerian general strike of 1945 in the Northern provinces, a previously under-researched region. It examines some of the many ways in which the strike has been understood in the academy, focusing in particular on the works of Alkasum Abba, Kazah-Toure and Bill Freund who have regarded the strike as well supported and successful. By employing Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos's analysis of the 1948 general strike in colonial Zimbabwe, this thesis re-reads the narrative of success by bringing to the fore previously ignored issues relating to questions of planning, tactics, propaganda, solidarity, leadership, and execution of the strike. This re-reading reveals a considerably more varied and uneven response across and within the different categories of workers than has been previously assumed by scholars. Such unevenness challenges notions of "solidarity" and "steadfastness" attributed to the industrial action, with implications for how workers struggles have been incorporated into wider narratives of decolonization and anti-colonial nationalism.



DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declared that *The 1945 General Strike in Northern Nigeria and its Role in Anti-Colonial Nationalism* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Stephen Yohanna

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DEDICATION

To the glory of God this study is dedicated to the memory of Pa Michael Athokhamien Ominus Imoudu, Yusufu Bala Usman, Chief Abdul-Ganiyu Oyesola Fawehinmi, Sir Patrick Ibrahim Yakowa, Lieutenant Kyom Leo Shittu (a friend and a brother), Captain Benjamin Toyiring Sule, and all lovers of peace, unity, and justice who contributed towards defending the common Nigerians.



KEYWORDS

Anti-colonial Nationalism

Labour

Political Unionism

General Strike

Northern Nigeria

Workers Union

Colonial Economic Re-organization

Industrial Dispute

Historiography



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACSTWU	-	African Civil Servants Technical Workers Union
ABU	-	Ahmadu Bello University
BBWA	-	Bank of British West Africa
BCGA	-	British Cotton Growing Association
CFAO	-	Campagne Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale
CMS	-	Church Missionary Society
COLA	-	Cost of Living Adjustment Cost of Living Allowance
CTS	-	Chief Traffic Superintendent
DRS	-	District Running Superintendent
DTS	-	Deputy Traffic Superintendent
FTU	-	Federation of Trade Unions
HOD	-	Head of Department
ILC	-	International Labour Conference
KASU	-	Kaduna State University
NA	-	Native Administration Native Authority
NAK	-	National Archive Kaduna
NCNC	-	National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons
NCSU	-	Nigerian Civil Servants Union
NEPU	-	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NHRS	-	Northern Historical Research Scheme

NLC	-	Nigerian Labour Congress
NNFL	-	Nigerian National Federation of Labour
NTWU	-	Nigerian Technical Workers Union
NUT	-	Nigerian Union of Teachers
PWD	-	Public Works Department
PZ	-	Patterson and Zochonis
RWAFF	-	Royal West African Frontier Force
RWU	-	Railway Workers Union
SCOA	-	Societe Commerciale Ouest Africaine
TETFund	-	Tertiary Education Trust Fund
TUCN	-	Trade Unions Congress of Nigeria
UAC	-	United Africa Company
VP	-	Vulnerable Points
WCF	-	War Charities Fortnight
WSE	-	Western Sudan Exporters



CHAPTER ONE

Labour and the Anti-Colonial Struggle in Nigeria: A Historiographical Overview

Introduction

The primary stimulus for undertaking this study is the scarcity of academic research on the 1945 general strike in Northern Nigeria. Previous studies carried out by scholars within the Northern Nigeria context dealt centrally with issues such as the development of capitalism, the imposition of colonial domination, colonial labour policies, political developments, as well as colonial legacies.¹ Admittedly, there have been some exceptional scholarly works that dwelt on strikes in Nigeria and other parts of Africa,² but regrettably these works hardly address the extent and level of participation in imperial Northern Nigeria. While the body of literature generated by these scholars is both profuse and broad in scope, an issue of considerable neglect is an understanding of the imperial Northern Nigeria as a specific and distinct historical region. By imperial Northern Nigeria, I refer to an area known as Central Sudan, or Hausa-land, during the pre-colonial period, and as the protectorate of Northern Nigeria during the era of colonization.³

As a way of responding to the absence of this region in the literature on the strike, this study aims to examine the specific dynamics of the 1945 general strike in Northern Nigeria. This will be done by outlining the economic development and significance of Northern Nigeria to

¹ Bello, Sule. *State and Economy in Kano, c. 1894-1960: A Study of Colonial Domination*. Zaria – Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Press, 2001; Freund, William M. "Labour Migration to the Northern Nigeria Tin Mines, 1903-1945." *Journal of African History*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (1981): 73-84; Harmon, Daniel E. *Exploration of Africa: The Emerging Nations (Nigeria 1880 to the Present: The Struggle, The Tragedy, The Promise)*. USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001; Lubeck, Paul M. *Islam and Urban Labor in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Ochonu, Moses E. *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression*. United State: Ohio University Press, 2009; Shenton, Robert W. *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986; Turaki, Yusufu. *The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria*. Jos-Nigeria: Challenge Press, 1993.

² Cooper, Frederick. "The Senegalese General Strike of 1946 and the Labour Question in Post-War French Africa." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / La Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (1990): 165-215; Kalinga, Owen J. M. "Resistance, Politics of Protest, and Mass Nationalism in Colonial Malawi, 1950-1960. A Reconsideration." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 36, Cahier 143, (1996): 443-454; Lindsay, Lisa A. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3, (Jun., 1999): 783-812; Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (Jun., 1975): 693-710.

³ Northern Nigeria comprises the provinces of Bauchi, Benue, Bornu, Ilorin, Kabba, Jos (Plateau), Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yola, and Zaria with Kaduna as its capital. This province may include one or more divisions in a non-Muslim location, and one or two emirates in Muslim locations. But there are exceptional cases in which both division(s) and emirate(s) can exist in a particular province. A division of this note may comprise of smaller emirate(s) and the independent district(s).

the British imperialists, and show how this affected the trajectory of the strike. The study will proceed to examine the organisation and execution of the strike, as well as how different groups responded to this labour crisis, in relation to what has been previously written by other scholars. In doing so, I also wish to interrogate the age-long notion of “solidarity” among the colonized labourers that has been embedded within the nationalist narratives. These scholarly literatures claimed the industrial action enjoyed unprecedented support of the colonized people. But the study set out to challenge this long-age notion to ascertain if this question of solidarity, especially as it relates to the national project, can withstand close scrutiny.

By way of introduction, this chapter provides some background on labour organisation in Nigeria. Although the labour unrest of 1945 in Northern Nigeria is at the centre of this research, the origin of unions and industrial action can be traced long before our period of study. This becomes evident when one takes a closer look at how workers’ unions emerged and developed. It is also important to situate the developments in Nigeria in a wider historiography of labour in Africa during this period, as well as to outline some key debates which are crucial to understanding the nature and pattern of the workers struggle.

The Historical Development of Workers Union Up to the Late 1940s

In tracing the historical development of workers struggles in Nigeria, it can be argued that the engagement of Henry Libert, a Sierra Leone national, into the Nigerian Civil Service in 1892 turned out to be a good omen for the Nigerian workers. This was because of the instrumental role he played in the formation of workers unions in Nigeria after he pioneered a meeting of African government workers in Lagos that recorded the attendance of thirty-three persons.⁴ Arnold Hughes and Robin Cohen have pointed out that in 1893 a Mechanics Mutual Aid Provident and Improvement Association was formed in Lagos as the earliest workers organisation.⁵ On 19 August 1912 the Southern Civil Service Union was inaugurated as a formal trade union and its membership grew to five hundred persons by 1913 with a hundred artisans and four hundred clerks.⁶ Thereafter the union’s activities found their way into the provinces of Northern Nigeria and a branch was established in Kaduna, the administrative

⁴ Okonkwo, Rina. “The Nigeria Civil Service Union, 1919-1922.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 26. No. 3,(1993): 609-610.

⁵ Hughes, Arnold and Cohen, Robin’s “An Emerging Nigerian Working Class: The Lagos Experience 1897-1939” in Gutkind, Peter Claus Wolfgang, Robin Cohen, and Jean Copans. *African Labor History*. Beverly Hills – California: Sage Publications, 1978: 37- 40.

⁶ Okonkwo, Rina. “The Nigeria Civil Service Union, 1919-1922.” 609-610.

capital of the North.⁷ The union was renamed the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) in 1914 following the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates under one colonial administration. By this stage the union's membership encompassed civil servants from far beyond the Southern region.⁸

In 1931 the Railway Workers Union (RWU) and Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) were formed as the two major trade unions,⁹ and these were followed by the emergence of the Marine Daily Paid Workers Union in 1937.¹⁰ However, Hughes and Cohen have noted that prior to the formation of RWU, there is documented evidence regarding the existence of no less than four unions organised in connection with the railways.¹¹ From the moment the first workers' organisation emerged to the period in which the major trade unions were formed that is, from 1893 to 1931, African government employees embarked on eighteen strike actions, of which five occurred along the railway by the artisan railroad staff of the Nigerian railways owing to threatened diminution in remunerations. On 1 April 1938 the Trade Union Ordinance was introduced by the imperial government which made it mandatory for all unions to meet certain criteria before they could be formally recognized as lawful trade unions. It was stated that:

*... any combination whether temporary or permanent, the principal purposes of which are the regulation of the relations between workmen and masters, or between workmen and workmen, or between masters and masters whether such combinations would or would not, if this Ordinance had not been enacted, have been deemed to have been unlawful combination by reason of some one or more of its purposes, being in restraint of trade.*¹²

The introduction of the Trade Union Ordinance was accompanied by significant development of unions. This development was also made possible due to rapid urban expansion and growth in the wage and salary earning population. Between 1912 and 1938 alone, about

⁷ Kaduna is considered to be entirely an artificial creation of the colonial administration in 1912 designed to serve as the administrative headquarters of Northern Nigeria, as well as a cantonment to cater for the garrison of the British colonial armed forces.

⁸ Okonkwo, Rina. "The Nigerian Civil Service Union, 1919-1922." 610.

⁹ Ademiluyi, Israel A., and Imhonopi, David F. "Trade Union Dynamism in a Belligerent State-Nigeria 1980-2007." *Journal of Economics and Engineering*, No. 4, (Dec., 2010): 46.

¹⁰ Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 27 (1-2-3), (1999): 49.

¹¹ Hughes, Arnold and Cohen, Robin's "An Emerging Nigerian Working Class: The Lagos Experience 1897-1939." 37-40, 48; Otopo, Dafe. *The Role of Trade Unions in Nigeria Industrial Relations*. Oxford: Malthouse Press, 1987: 17.

¹² Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*, London: Heinemann Books Limited, 1974: 180-181.

twelve workers organizations were said to have been formed,¹³ whereas by December 1941 the number had grown to forty one unions.¹⁴ The post-1942 years saw even greater growth in unionization than in the pre-1942 period. Among the reasons seen to be responsible for this was the economic crisis of the Second World War and the General Defence Regulations of 1942, which outlawed lockouts and strikes during the war era¹⁵ and which the labouring class construed as a deliberate attempt to restrain its growing militance.

Significant to note here is that the RWU became the mouthpiece of all the unions during this period. While the NCSU was unable to fulfil the trade union registration requirements as stipulated in the 1938 Trade Union Ordinance until 1948, the RWU under the leadership of Michael Athokhamien Ominus Imoudu, was considered to be the 'laboratory for the development of workers consciousness',¹⁶ spearheading the Nigerian labour union movement. In November 1942 the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) came into being and in July 1943 was renamed the Trade Unions Congress of Nigeria (TUCN). This was regarded as the first central labour organisation and accorded full recognition by the colonial administration with T. A. Bankole as its elected president while M. A. Tokunboh served as the general secretary, and P. S. Taiwo and Obafemi Awolowo served as the treasurer and editor of the TUCN publication respectively.¹⁷ July 1943 also witnessed the emergence of the Federal Union of Native Administration Staff (FUNAS) with A. S. Coker being its national president.¹⁸ Kazah-Toure has argued that the formation of FUNAS at that moment was not to address the plight of the native administration staff, but to mobilize the workers towards winning the war efforts.¹⁹

On 26 August 1944, a central political party known as the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) emerged under the leadership of Olayinka Herbert Samuel Heelas

¹³ Fashoyin, Tayo. *Industrial Relation in Nigeria: Development and Practice*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1985: 23.

¹⁴ Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 49.

¹⁵ Fashoyin, Tayo. *Industrial Relation in Nigeria: Development and Practice*. 23.

¹⁶ Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 50.

¹⁷ Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 49.

¹⁸ Toure, Kazah-Toure. "The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960." M.A., Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1991: 348.

¹⁹ Toure, Kazah-Toure. "The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960." 348-349; Also see FUNAS... Memo from the Acting Resident of Zaria Province to the SNP Kaduna dated July, 14, 1943 in NAK: Zaria Prof., c.12/1939 - "Labour Appointments in the Colonial Empire". (1939-43); NAK: Zaria Prof., LAB/18 Vol. 1 - "N. A Staff Federal Union" (1944-54).

Badmus Macaulay (commonly refers to as Herbert Macaulay), to which TUCN became an affiliate member shortly after its official unveiling.²⁰ This affiliation was due to the supporting role nationalist politicians accorded the labour movement especially during a rally to mark Michael Imoudu's release from prison on 2 June 1945. Mindful of the need to secure a popular base, the leadership of NCNC alongside the Nigerian workers and other sympathizers gathered at Oko Awo in Lagos to welcome Michael Imoudu. Herbert Macaulay who was the NCNC leader and who chaired the occasion in his address to the crowd showered praises on the labour leader. Herbert Macaulay further used the opportunity to discuss politics and urged the Nigerian workers to consider their struggle for favourable working and living conditions as part and parcel of the anti-colonial struggle.²¹ Such sentiments were echoed by other speakers such as Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe (also known as Zik), the general secretary of NCNC, and Madam Alimotu Pelewura, the leader of Lagos Market Womens' Association, who proclaimed the labour struggle as marking a significant chapter in Nigeria's wider liberation struggle. On the 16 February 1946 a newly acclaimed radical nationalist group known as the Zikist Movement emerged, which comprised mostly of young school leavers inspired by the lifestyle and writings of Nnamdi Azikiwe, based on the philosophy of self-rule.²²

In an attempt to strengthen the relationship between labour and politics, the Zikist press through the *West African Pilot* and *Daily Comet* newspapers gave favourable attention to union affairs.²³ It was after gaining support from the politicians and traders alike that the leadership of the workers union at midnight of 21 June 1945 declared a general strike in protest at government's failure to fulfil some of its war era "developmentalist rhetoric", as well as government's failure to return to the negotiation table in the face of economic challenges which accompanied the aftermath of the Second World War.²⁴ It is this strike, and how it played out in Northern Nigeria, that is the subject of this thesis.

²⁰ Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 51.

²¹ Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 169.

²² Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 51; Furlong, Patrick J. "Azikiwe and the National Church of the Nigeria and the Cameroons: A Case Study of the Political Use of Religion in African Nationalism." *African Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 364, (Jul., 1992): 434.

²³ Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 698.

²⁴ Lindsay, Lisa A. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenships in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike." 783.

Bjorn Beckman and Lloyd Sachikonye have posited that the place of labour in politics has for long been debated not only across Africa but globally. The existence of two factions within the labour movement which ideologically stood in sharp contrast with each other, with a union wing on one side and a faction that supported the involvement in party politics on the other side further explained this contest.²⁵ By analysing and situating these categories within the Nigerian context, it was evident that the labour organization's continued alliance with these nationalist bodies triggered disagreement among TUCN members along ideological lines, but in 1947 the TUCN voted for continued affiliation and the inseparability of labour from politics. In March 1948 this development was criticized by an antagonist's camp which scholars like Robin Cohen and Rotimi Ajayi among others regarded as the conservatives within the labour movement. In their activism for labour neutrality in party politics, this group sponsored a motion for disaffiliation of labour from politics during the 27 December 1948 TUCN sixth annual delegate's convention that was held on the premises of the Church Missionary Society Grammar School (CMS) in Lagos. In opposing this position those arguing for a closer relationship with political parties proposed 'that the TUCN now throws its full weight into the NCNC because the Nigerian proletariat and masses desire the continued affiliation...'²⁶ The conservative group argued that 'overt political links were incompatible with trade union principles'.²⁷ As part of their argument, H. P. Adebola lamented that:

*... Unwarranted association with non-labour political parties tends to diminish the enviable positions which workers should occupy in the scheme of things. Instead of political parties soliciting for support of workers, the workers are soliciting for support of political parties where ideologies are at variance with those of the labouring class.*²⁸

Having felt uncomfortable with the outcome of the convention, the acclaimed radical faction of the union who opted for a structural link with party politics and comprised F. O. Coker, Michael Imoudu, Nduka Eze, P. O. Balonwu, and Richard Aghedo withdrew from the TUCN and formed the rival Nigerian National Federation of Labour (NNFL) in March 1949 with

²⁵ See Bjorn Beckman, Sakhela Buhlungu and Lloyd Sachikonye. *Trade Unions and Party Politics: Labour Movement in Africa*. South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2010: 1-4.

²⁶ Jaja, S. O. "The Enugu Colliery Massacre in Retrospect: An Episode in British Administration in Nigeria." *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 11, No. 3 / 4, (Dec., 1982 – Jun., 1983): 88.

²⁷ Adewumi, Funmi. "Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement." *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Jun., 2007): 58; Ajayi, Rotimi. "The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960." 50-55; Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*, 71-75.

²⁸ Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*, 169.

Michael Imoudu as the president and Nduka Eze as the general-secretary.²⁹ This split within the labour movement continued up to November of the same year. The shooting at protesting coal miners by the police at Iva valley, which was a coal mining site in Enugu, a town in South-Eastern Nigeria, saw the merger of these different factions within the labour movement. This encounter resulted in the killing of twenty one persons, and reported wounding of fifty one protesting striking miners.³⁰

The experience once again made the unionists appreciate the importance of working together despite their ideological differences. According to Nduka Eze, a member of the protagonist camp as well as the Zikist movement, this experience cautioned both ‘the radicals and the moderates, the revolutionaries and the stooges, the bourgeoisie and the workers’ to put aside ‘their differences, [remembering] the word “Nigeria” and [rising] in revolt against evil and inhumanity’.³¹ In his remarks on the incident, Richard Sklar claimed that ‘no previous event ever evoked a manifestation of national consciousness comparable to the indignation generated by this tragedy’.³² It was as a result of this that both the representatives of TUCN and those of NNFL agreed to meet and they resolved to form the first Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) which became an umbrella body of all the labour organizations in Nigeria with Michael Imoudu as its elected president, F. O. Coker the deputy president, and Nduka Eze the general-secretary.³³ However, the merger was seen by former TUCN leaders as an unhappy marriage which later proved difficult to maintain. This was because having dominated the key leadership positions within the NLC the ex-NNFL leaders advanced and established formal ties with the NCNC. This development further created a rift within the labour movement in which the conservative wing eschewed the agreement of relinquishing their assets to the newly formed body.³⁴

²⁹ Adewumi, Funmi. “Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement.” 58.

³⁰ Ajayi, Rotimi. “The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960.” 55; Adewumi, Funmi. “Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement.” 58; Otopo, Dafe. *The Role of Trade Unions in Nigeria Industrial Relations*. 27, 30.

³¹ Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 74; Sklar, Richard L. *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Trenton – NJ: Africa World Press, 2004: 77.

³² Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 74; Sklar, Richard L. *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent Nation*. 77.

³³ Adewumi, Funmi. “Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement.” 58.

³⁴ Adewumi, Funmi. “Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement.” 58; Ajayi, Rotimi. “The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960.” 54-55; Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 74-75.

Historiography of the strike

Several scholars of African history have argued that the 1940s onwards marked a significant chapter in the histories of anti-colonial struggles in many colonial African societies owing to the intensification in campaigns that stimulated anti-colonial nationalism towards self-government. Within this literature, labour historians have further acknowledged the importance of this period, which was characterized by waves of strikes and protests in different parts of colonial Africa. Examples of such labour unrest includes the general strikes that occurred in Nigeria in 1945, Senegal in 1946, the South African Gold Miners' strike in 1946, Kenya (Mombasa) in 1947, Tanzania (Dar-es-Salaam) in 1947, Gold Coast in 1948, as well as Southern Rhodesia 1948 respectively.³⁵ There are various records of work stoppages embarked on by African government employees prior to this period. In Nigeria for instance, Hughes and Cohen listed the occurrence of twenty different strikes and other labour disturbances from 1913 to 1939.³⁶ These strikes were regarded as an 'exemplary case of collective action that creates a demand for norms about worker participation'.³⁷

Frederick Cooper elucidates the tensions that culminated in this labour unrest not only in Nigeria but in other parts of colonial Africa by analysing the imperial state's 'attempt to nurture consent around the war, through the modality of loyalty'.³⁸ Despite the hardship of the post-depression years, the agitation for better living and working conditions of the African workers remained out of the question to the colonial authority as a result of Britain's involvement in the Second World War.³⁹ Instead of attending to the labour question, the colonial regime used the war to canvas for support from the colonized people by encouraging intensive labour recruitment in the field of agricultural, construction, mining, as well as in the

³⁵ See Cooper, Frederick. *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 31; Cooper, Frederick. "The Senegalese General Strike of 1946 and the Labour Question in Post-War French Africa." 165-215; Phimister, Ian and Brian Raftopoulos. "'Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe": African Nationalists and Black Workers - The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe." *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (Sep., 2000): 289-318; Lunn, Jon. "The Meaning of the 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe", in Raftopoulos, Brian and Tsuneo Yoshikuni. *Sites of Struggle: Essays in Zimbabwe's Urban History*. Avondale-Harare, Zimbabwe: Weavers Press, 1999: 163-182.

³⁶ Peter C. W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen, and Jean Copans, *African Labour History*. 39-40.

³⁷ Akkerman, Agnes, Marieke J. Born, and René Torenlvlied. "Solidarity, Strikes, and Scabs: How Participation Norms Affect Union Members' Willingness to Strike." *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 40, No. 3, (2013): 253; Vickery, Kenneth P. "The Rhodesia Railways African Strike of 1945, Part II: Cause, Consequence, Significance." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (Mar., 1999): 49-71.

³⁸ As contained in Brian Raftopoulos comments email by Nicky Rousseau on 16 April 2014.

³⁹ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, 1996: 114-115.

military.⁴⁰ But these policies only aggravated the people's conditions as their living and working standards worsened. The situation gave rise to widespread protest and a march on the governor's office in 1942 which won for the African workers a cost of living allowance (COLA) but this was eventually rendered worthless by the war demands.⁴¹ It was after months of what appeared like a fruitless exchange of correspondence for an upward review in COLA between the workers union and the colonial government that the union reacted with an industrial action. How this development played out in Northern Nigeria will be examined in chapter two of this study.

Douglas Blackmur observes that 'whilst the history of strikes and lockouts clearly cannot be confined to the principal confrontations, they nevertheless deserve special attention given their important consequences for change in wider society'.⁴² This has made several scholars raise questions especially with regard to solidarity and steadfastness among co-strikers when it comes to issues of labour disputes.⁴³ Among these scholars are Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos who by examining the organisation and significance of the 1948 general strike in colonial Zimbabwe highlighted the complexity surrounding the interpretations of such a wave of mass labour unrest that was seen as shaping the nationalist struggle.⁴⁴ Even though they do not dispute the economic hardship of the post-World War II, which without a shred of doubt has long been recognised as one among several factors that culminated in these industrial disputes in most colonial African societies, they questioned sentiments evidenced in some scholarly works related to the strike question.⁴⁵ They did this by interrogating the degree of participation among discrete groups in the industrial dispute and arrived at unevenness at different levels, thereby questioning whether this labour unrest could be meritoriously transcribed as a nationwide general strike. This multidimensional historical development as Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos have argued has made it even more problematic for scholars working in the nationalist tradition to situate labour struggles in their laudable

⁴⁰ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 125.

⁴¹ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 134.

⁴² Blackmur, Douglas. *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*. Leichhardt – Australia: The Federation Press, 1993: 188.

⁴³ Akkerman, Agnes, Marieke J. Born, and René Torenvlied. "Solidarity, Strikes, and Scabs: How Participation Norms Affect Union Members' Willingness to Strike." 250-253.

⁴⁴ Phimister, Ian and Brian Raftopoulos. "'Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe": African Nationalists and Black Workers - The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe." 316-318.

⁴⁵ Phimister, Ian and Brian Raftopoulos. "'Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe": African Nationalists and Black Workers - The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe." 289, 294; Lunn, Jon. "The Meaning of the 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe." 164.

narratives.⁴⁶ In substantiating this point, Robin Cohen has noted that ‘there is considerable controversy in the literature as to how involved the trade unions were in the nationalist movements’.⁴⁷

With regard to Northern Nigeria, Toure Kazah-Toure is among the few scholars who have featured the 1945 general strike in their work, especially in the area of “history from below”.⁴⁸ By analysing the concept of class struggle and situating it within the nationalist context, Kazah-Toure opined that nationalist struggles can be scientifically analysed only through the understanding of class conflicts between the imperial government and the imperial citizens.⁴⁹ In supporting this, Kazah-Toure examined ways through which the colonized people of Northern Nigeria contested the policies of the colonial regime. One of the measures the people adopted was the withdrawal of their labour which has for long been considered a component of the bargaining process in industrial relations.⁵⁰ This work was supported by Alkasum Abba who acknowledged the incorporation of the working class into the fibre of the emancipation struggle as he argues that this radically hastened the anti-colonial struggle.⁵¹ Kazah-Toure, Alkasum Abba, and Bill Freund have posited the industrial action of 1945 in Nigeria as a successful historical exercise owing to the support both workers and the general public accorded it in spite of the imperial government’s efforts to defeat it.⁵²

Notwithstanding the said form of backing, it can be argued that these scholars gave insufficient attention to issues relating to the question of planning, tactics, propaganda, solidarity, and form of leadership among others, hence arriving at their conclusion of a “success story” rather than reflecting on the question of instability that was a key feature of

⁴⁶ Phimister, Ian and Brian Raftopoulos. “Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe”: African Nationalists and Black Workers - The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe”, pp. 316-318.

⁴⁷ Cohen, Robin. *Contested Domains: Debates in International Labour Studies*. London: Zed Books Limited, 1991: 84.

⁴⁸ The term ‘history from below’ is largely employed in a branch of Social History as a way of recovery experiences of the ‘ordinary people’. This is clearly expressed in the work of Jim Sharpe, ‘History from Below’, in Peter Burke (ed), *New perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge – United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2001.

⁴⁹ Toure, Kazah-Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902 – 1960.” xiii-xiv.

⁵⁰ Salamon, Michael. *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*. Fourth Edition, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited, 2000: 411.

⁵¹ Abba, Alkasum. “The Significance of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the Politics of Nigeria.” Ph.D., Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2000: 66.

⁵² Abba, Alkasum. “The Significance of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.) in the Politics of Nigeria.” 65; Freund, Bill. *The African Worker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988: 19; Toure, Kazah-Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902 – 1960.” 400-407.

the workers strike in Nigeria especially when one takes a closer look at the level of participation among the labouring class. A significant point worth mentioning as it relates to the general strike question is that a critical examination of primary and secondary sources refutes the generalization of workers' involvement in the strike even within the context of Northern Nigeria. As Kazah-Toure noted in his work, moves by the colonial authority to defeat the strike by encouraging blacklegs yielded results in some areas, thus placing doubts on the claim of "complete solidarity" among the striking workers or from their sympathizers. It can also be argued that in order to defend their jobs some workers never took part in the strike and others returned to their places of work even before their union leadership agreed to do so; others waited till the end. Although Kazah-Toure argues that the nonparticipation of some workers such as the clerical staff in the industrial dispute was a calculated deed mainly to provide financial support to other striking workers,⁵³ it can also be argued that the question of variation in workers' involvement in the industrial dispute might have been provoked by the fact that the imperial authority continually termed the strike as illegal, a situation that led to the withdrawal of some of the union's top echelons on the eve of the industrial action, as well as resulting in two opposing camps emerging among the workers. Chapter three of this study offers an explanation for this unevenness, pointing to the different interests in the working communities affected by the strike. This unevenness emphasises the need to problematize the issue of solidarity and uniformity amongst workers.

The political implications of this labour unrest in the sphere of anti-colonial movement should not be ignored. This was because, mindful of the weakening imperial supremacy which resulted from the on-going disagreement between the labouring class and the colonial officials, African politicians, especially after the shooting incident on striking miners, resolved to incorporate what appeared as a militant union into their political affairs by using the language of "nationalism and solidarity".⁵⁴ This point was complemented by an argument that was put forward by Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto who posit that, though the 1945 industrial action was considered a form of economic nationalism that was carried out by the imperial employees, to an extent it can also be regarded as politically motivated so as to sabotage the imperialism of the colonial regime.⁵⁵

⁵³Toure, Kazah-Toure. "The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902 – 1960." 405.

⁵⁴ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 1996: 20.

⁵⁵ Falola, Toyin and Saheed Aderinto. *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*. USA: University of Rochester press, 2010: 49-50; Harneit - Sievers, Axel. "African Business, "Economic Nationalism", and British Colonial

The place of unions in politics has for long remained a subject of considerable debate and, as earlier pointed out, led to the emergence of two opposing camps within the Nigerian labour movement. Thus, Elliot J. Berg and Jeffrey Butler debated that the place of labour unions in political affairs has for long been embellished especially in contemporary Africa. But this political affiliation was considered as a significant component of the workers' struggle. And using Nigeria as a case study, Bill Freund argues that this 'political language survived in a state which itself was probably among the most conservative in its politics in all Africa'.⁵⁶ In what appears to be an attempt to draw a contradistinction between labour and politics, Robin Cohen provided an assessment of unions and their political significance by examining the dialectical relationship which existed between what he regarded as "economic unionism" and "political unionism".⁵⁷ Cohen argues that political influence in the labour movement especially as it relates to nationalist movements was prompted by a number of social factors. The relationship between labour and politics, he argues, provided an alternative medium through which workers could bargain with their employers.⁵⁸ Cohen further identified the agency of the ordinary, lower class workers in participating not only in union activities but independent political processes. Andrew J. Taylor has also maintained that unions' involvement in political affairs signified the importance of the imperial workforce to the advent of class politics as well as in complementing and supplementing the collective bargaining processes. This according to Taylor was necessitated by the urge to 'resolve [the]economic crisis, or act as a counterbalance to the economic and political power of the employers'.⁵⁹

By analysing the economic factor which was a favoured theme in Marxist historiography, scholars like Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton among others have conceptualized the 1945 industrial action as signifying the advent of a new force in the anti-colonial nationalist movement that was entrenched in the struggle to dismantle the colonial regime.⁶⁰ Although

Policy: Southern Nigeria, 1935-1954." *African Economic History*, No. 24 (1996): 25-68; Nwoke, Chibuzo N. "Towards Authentic Economic Nationalism in Nigeria." *Africa Today*, Vol. 33, No. 4; 4th Quarter, (1986): 51-69.

⁵⁶ Freund, Bill. *The African Worker*. 19.

⁵⁷ See Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 145-150; Ona, Soley. Review on Robin Cohen's "Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71." *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1975): 358.

⁵⁸ Cohen, Robin. *Labour and Politics in Nigeria: 1945-71*. 147-148, 234.

⁵⁹ Taylor, Andrew J. *Trade Unions and Politics: A Comparative Introduction*. London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1989: 1-2.

⁶⁰ Falola, Toyin and Matthew Heaton M. *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 136, 144; Cooper, Frederick. "Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective." *The*

the meaning of nationalism certainly did not get to a point of an uncontested end, Lloyd Kramer posits that 'nationalist ideas are thus a distinctive form of modern thought that shapes the political actions and cultural identities of individuals as well as groups'.⁶¹ It was in this light that some scholars like Hakim Adi viewed the first half of the twentieth century as a moment of new potentials.⁶² Frederick Cooper regarded the mid-1930s up to the late 1940s as 'a break point in colonial thinking' that proffered prospects to political activists in the imperial empires.⁶³ Similarly, Lisa Lindsay suggested it 'represented a moment of open possibilities',⁶⁴ while Jon Lunn considered it as a 'break with the future'⁶⁵ which encouraged more involvement in union activities. It can be argued that this was due to the wave of labour unrest which apparently cautioned the imperial regimes on the need to deal with the labour question and to provide policies to alleviate the exacting consequences of the post-World War economic crisis. All these developments were made possible due to what Paulo Freire conceptualized as the yearning for the liberation of labour, suppression of alienation, as well as overall sovereignty.⁶⁶

This chapter has focused on some key historiographical issues in the study of labour and the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, and analysed how these played out within the provinces of Northern Nigeria. Its purpose was to examine how the colonized people in Northern Nigeria contended with the imperialist policies and to locate the degree of their involvement in the workers' struggles for better working and living conditions. In the next section I provide an outline of the thesis.

Methodology and Chapter Outline

James Cronin has cautioned that:

Journal of African History, Vol. 49, No. 2, (2008): 172; Daura, Prasenjit. *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*. London: Routledge, 2004: 103, 118.

⁶¹ Kramer, Lloyd. "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 58, No. 3, (Jul., 1997): 526.

⁶² Adi, Hakim. "Pan-Africanism and West African Nationalism in Britain." *African Studies Review*, Vol. 43, Issue 01, (Apr., 2000): 69.

⁶³ Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. London – England: University of California Press, 2005: 187, 238; Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 18; Cooper, Frederick. "Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective." 173.

⁶⁴ Lindsay, Lisa A. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenships in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike." 788.

⁶⁵ Lunn, Jon. "The Meaning of the 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe." 177-178.

⁶⁶ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Limited, 2005: 44.

*Writing the history of industrial strife requires a serious methodological choice right at the onset: whether to treat strikes narrowly, in case studies of a particular strike or the strikes of a single year or industry; or whether to cast one's net more widely, in hopes that an aggregate treatment will yield insights and information of a more broadly applicable nature.*⁶⁷

In this study I have chosen to follow the narrow path, focusing on a specific strike, namely the 1945 industrial action in Northern Nigeria. The scope of the research has necessitated a critical and thorough examination of both primary and secondary sources which are accessible in colonial and post-colonial archives and libraries. A good number of primary sources identified and consulted in the course of this study are located within official minutes of meetings, memoranda, confidential as well as imperial government notices available at the National Archive as well as the Northern Historical Research Scheme (NHRS) otherwise referred to as Arewa House, both situated at Kaduna. These files contained information on labour appointments in colonial empire, the scope and duties of labour department, labour conditions, labour unrest, as well as the settlement of labour disputes among other issues in the colonial provinces of Northern Nigeria. These primary sources have been complemented with other scholarly works. Together these materials offer the opportunity to explore the building tensions that culminated in labour unrest and which shape our understanding of the anti-colonial struggle.

In the second chapter I will examine the forms of economic reorganization especially as they relate to mobilization and production and the crisis embedded within it. I will argue that it is only by way of scrutinizing the longer term restructuring of the imperial economy that one can grasp the tension that built up to the 1940s. The chapter will further illustrate that the crisis in agriculture, the effects of the rural-urban migratory flow, the growing challenges of wage labour in the towns, as well as the failure of the colonial state to respond to these issues prepared the ground for the 1945 industrial dispute.

Through a careful scrutiny of a wide range of empirical sources which complimented other secondary literatures, in the third chapter I will draw attention to issues and facts which have not received sufficient attention from other scholarly works. This will be done by giving

⁶⁷ Blackmur, Douglas. *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*; 189; Cronin, James E. *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain*. London – Croom Helm, 1979: 10.

emphasis to the question of the strike initiation, organization, and execution, forms of leadership, propaganda, and solidarity among its other features with the aim of unravelling how diverse groups responded to the industrial action. This will demonstrate how the strike played out in Northern Nigeria and the effect it had on the decolonization process. In my final chapter I will provide a brief summary and overall conclusion.

Conclusion

As suggested above, the intention of this study is to highlight the ways through which workers in imperial Northern Nigeria struggled to effect changes in their living conditions by engaging the colonial power structures. However, this struggle needs to be situated in the wider changes in the local economy and the living and working condition of the colonized workers. Frederick Cooper's work provides a broader conceptualisation of labour questions by demonstrating the ways the colonial state took advantage of the war to combine coercion and consent in its dealings with workers. This study will argue how various modalities such as confiscation of foodstuffs, cut in pays, labour conscriptions, contributions toward winning the war project, and the award of "victory badge" among other measures were used by the colonizers on the colonized people of Northern Nigeria.

The anti-colonial movement, as argued by scholars, was heightened during the Second World War years. As the colonial authority failed to grant their African employees demands for an upward review of COLA in the face of economic hardship, these employees threatened to embark on a general strike despite the colonial authority terming it as unlawful under the War Time Defence Regulation Act. Nationalist politicians on their part threw their full support behind the workers. It was on that note that colonial officials alleged that the politicians were those behind the industrial dispute, the same way Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto saw it as politically motivated. While the colonial state was using the language of loyalty, African politicians used the language of nationalism and solidarity, placing the Nigerian worker was at a centre of class conflict and the struggle for supremacy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Defining Moment: Northern Nigeria on the Eve of the General Strike

Introduction

In order to properly comprehend the events leading to the 1945 strike action in colonial Nigeria, there is a need to examine economic developments over a longer time frame in Northern Nigeria. Such developments were largely brought into being through the policies and practices of the colonial state. These interventions provided the framework within which broad economic and social changes took place in both the rural and urban economies, providing the background and context in which the strike emerged. This chapter discusses the effect of agricultural reorganization and of migratory flow in Northern Nigeria as a response to the newly created wage earning opportunities by the European firms and their compradors. It will investigate how fundamental the need for more manpower was throughout the inter-war years and specifically during the Second World War period by examining the circumstances leading to the intensification of labour exploitation. It will also argue that as Britain needed to step up exportation more than ever before, migrant and wage labourers had to contend with taxes, levies and other responsibilities that were imposed on them, a situation that gave rise to a drastic reduction in the price of labour.

In a nutshell, the argument in this chapter is that the tension leading to the 1945 workers strike in Northern Nigeria must be understood not only in relation to the clamouring for an amendment in the cost of living allowance (COLA), but in conjunction with the longer-term restructuring of the economy and the need to maximize the labour potential of the colonial empire which created friction within the local economy. This did not only result in general scarcity and a progressive increase in the prices of essential and imported goods, but also in a decline in the cost of labour, other exportable commodities as well as the general standard of living. This situation compelled the representatives of the workers' union to forward a request for an upward review in the COLA, to which the colonial government remained insensitive, thereby setting the stage for a general strike of government public workers in the late days of June 1945.

The Effects of Economy Re-organization on Labour and Wages in Northern Nigeria

Researchers posit agriculture to be the dominant occupation of the inhabitants of Northern Nigeria as well as the backbone of the Nigerian economy prior to the establishment of the British colonial administration in the first decade of the twentieth century. Farming in this region is specifically done in wet and dry seasons with beans, cassava, groundnut, guinea corn, maize, millet, rice, yam, among others as food crops. There was a transformation in the agricultural sector as focus shifted from production for family consumption to production in exportable commodities due largely to the role cotton among other crops played especially in North and West Africa.⁶⁸ As a result, cotton alongside indigo and tobacco became the most widely grown non-food crops in the region. Several attempts had been made by the colonial authorities to promote cotton production especially by the first decade of the twentieth century due to its relevance to the colonial economy.

The British Cotton Growing Association (henceforth refer to as BCGA) was founded at a general meeting held at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce on June 12, 1902 with a capital injection of £50,000. This was increased to £500,000 in 1904 and Alfred Jones was elected as head of BCGA, vested with the responsibility of promoting the production, processing, and marketing of cotton.⁶⁹ In 1906 he was reported to have remarked that:

*We have pursued our enquiries throughout the British Empire and the one place which offers the greatest possibility of providing the millions of bales of cotton which are required is Northern Nigeria, we are absolutely convinced that in Northern Nigeria alone lies the salvation of Lancashire [and the cotton industry]. It is not impossible that at some future date Northern Nigeria will produce at least seven million bales, or sufficient to supply the whole requirements of Great Britain, and to leave an equal quantity over for other cotton consuming countries.*⁷⁰

In an effort to expand the cotton growing industry, BCGA upon arrival concentrated on the development of an effective transport network especially by expanding the railway from Southern Nigeria to Kano in Northern Nigeria. It was believed that this would develop the

⁶⁸ Kriger, Colleen E. "Mapping the History of Cotton Textile Production in Pre-colonial West Africa." *African Economic History*, No. 33 (2005): 87-116.

⁶⁹ Hinds, Allister. "Colonial Policy and Nigerian Cotton Exports." *The International of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1996): 26.

⁷⁰ Ekundare, Olufemi R. *An Economy History of Nigeria 1860-1960*, London: Methuen and Co. Limited, 1973: 170-171.

area into a large cotton source for foreign firms and even leave a surplus for re-export.⁷¹ This became necessary in order to arrest the decline of British textile industries which was caused by the cessation of the supply of raw material from the United State of America (USA).⁷² It was due to the cotton prospect of Northern Nigeria that BCGA began to establish experimental stations to carry out tests in cotton staples, while cotton seeds were imported and distributed among local farmers to serve as an impetus towards the boosting of cotton production in commercial quantity. The British colonial officials alongside their local counterparts such as emirs, district and village heads were used in the propagation of cotton. These local rulers were charged with the responsibility of providing “Cotton Mallams” (cotton teachers) who after receiving training from agricultural officers would in turn orientate the rural farmers on the newer methods of cotton production. Gazetted markets which were under the supervision of the native authorities agents were established and several agents with adequate knowledge of the rural areas were hired to purchase the produce from the peasant farmers.⁷³ It was claimed that the resultant effect of the boom in the cotton business was the eventual growth of towns such as Futua, Gombe, Gusau, Kano, and Zaria among others.

However, while colonial administrators were committed to promoting cotton cultivation which was meeting increasingly stiff competition internationally, farmers in Northern Nigeria had already taken groundnut cultivation to a larger scale due to the new potentially lucrative commercial opportunity it offered.⁷⁴ Robert Shenton proffered an explanation as to why the groundnut plant had come to dominate the fortunes of the political economy of Northern Nigeria, arguing that the long-standing and wide cultivation of groundnut was no doubt associated with the fact that the plant was considered to be a “natural blessing to the tropical

⁷¹ Dunning, Lennihan L. “The Origins and Development of Agricultural Wage Labour in Northern Nigeria, 1886-1980.” Ph.D., Columbia University, New York, 1983: 123-124.

⁷² Beckert, Sven. “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War.” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 109, No. 5 (Dec., 2004): 1405-1438; Hogendorn, J. S. “The Cotton Campaign in Northern Nigeria, 1902-1914: An Early Example of a Public/Private Planning Failure in Agriculture”, in Isaacman, Allen F. and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann and James Currey, 1995: 51-52.

⁷³ Waziri, Ibrahim M. “The Economy of British Borno: A Case Study of the Impact of Selected Commodities in the Emergence and Growth of a Cash Economy, 1902-1945.” Ph.D., Department of History, University of Maiduguri, 1996:111.

⁷⁴ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 48; Isaacman, Allen F. and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 64-65. It should be noted that alongside cotton and groundnut, Northern Nigeria had made a remarkable impact in the supply of other exportable commodities such as tobacco, shea butter, bennie seed, indigo, livestock, hides and skins among others.

farmer”.⁷⁵ J. Withers Gill who was a one-time Resident of Kano observed that ‘an enormous increase in cultivation of groundnuts is apparent and every possible producer ... is straining every effort to have a share in the big profits anticipated’.⁷⁶ This was partly because groundnuts stood in both as food and cash crop, and cultivation required neither much labour nor a large acre of land. J. S. Hogendorn popularized a myth which considered the “higher prices” obtainable from groundnut cultivation as a justification for peasant preference for the cultivation than cotton,⁷⁷ but Sule Bello argued that unlike in Zaria, climatic constraints and the unsuitability of Kano’s soil to cotton cultivation posed a challenge to its production.⁷⁸

Due to the significance of groundnuts to the colonial economy, farmers in rural areas were motivated through seed distribution, financial assistance, and to a greater extent guaranteed patronage by established agents and suppliers, a campaign championed by a group of Hausa traders who in return sold the crop to the expatriate firms.⁷⁹ As drawn from the 1941 records of Gombe division which was a substantial producer of food and raw materials in the Bauchi province for instance, 10,000 tons out of the 13,500 tons of groundnuts that were produced were exported, while 11,000 tons out of the 15,000 tons produced were also said to be exported by November the same year. Whereas sellers at Baro, Lokoja, and Makurdi obtained £10 from the sale of the crop, their counterparts at Adamawa and Kano went home with £9 from the same form of transaction and a minimal amount of £8 negotiated at other trading centres.⁸⁰ Although its monetary worth differed according to the environment, the important role played by both cotton and groundnuts in sustaining Britain’s industries and in prosecuting the Second World War cannot be overlooked. This became more glaring especially during the 1945 industrial action as officials of the BCGA amongst others were reported to act as volunteers in maintaining essential services when African government workers embarked on a general strike. At a meeting on 22 October 1945, the African workers

⁷⁵ Shenton, Robert W. *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*. 74; Salau, Bashir M. “The Role of Slave Labour in Groundnut Production in Early Colonial Kano.” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 51, Issue 02 (Jul., 2010): 147-165.

⁷⁶ Isaacman, Allen F. and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 65.

⁷⁷ Isaacman, Allen F. and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 64-65.

⁷⁸ Bello, Sule. *State and Economy in Kano c. 1894 to 1960: A Study of Colonial Domination*. 141.

⁷⁹ Isaacman, Allen F. and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*. 65.

⁸⁰ Bappah, Umar. “The Impact of British Colonial Rule on Agriculture in Gombe Division, 1900-1945: A Study of Agricultural Underdevelopment.” M.A., Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1988: 178-180; Olukoju, Ayodeji. ““Buy British, Sell Foreign”: External Trade Control Policies in Nigeria during World War II and its aftermath, 1939-1950.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2/3 (2002): 372- 373.

on the other hand, indicated their understanding of the significance of cotton and groundnuts to the colonial government, by noting that the eve of the groundnut opening season was an important moment for subsequent industrial action, and declared that 'if the strike is on in the fixed time, the government will lose a lot by their not making anything in groundnut season'.⁸¹

It is significant to observe that the economy of Northern Nigeria was dominated by a country or group of companies at different historical periods. This domination was based on superior technology and military power which was used to impose a pattern of production, which included the conditions that had to be met before goods could enter into some economies, the price at which commodities and services were bought, and the currencies through which they were traded.⁸² Available historical evidence suggests that not less than fifteen companies were believed to have dominance over the Nigeria's economy with the United Africa Company (UAC) with John Holt (a Liverpool Merchant) controlling over 80% of the economy, especially in the areas of import-export and retail trade, banking and insurance. Beside UAC and John Holt for instance, several other foreign firms were also engaged in the groundnuts purchasing and exporting business within the Borno and Kano province.⁸³

Labour, Wages, and Migration: An Unbroken Dialogue

By examining how the economic restructuring impacted on the people in Northern Nigeria, it can be argued that colonization and the incorporation of African societies into the Western capitalist system played an instrumental role in the migratory flow across societies. During this period, streams of migrant labourers moved from the nonwage, informal rural economy to urban wage sectors to take advantage of wage earning opportunities in cash cropping

⁸¹ NAK: Zaria Prof. c.4/1945 in "General Strike (1945)," see 'Intelligent Report In Re the Strike, October 29,' by John Odiase, dated 23 October, 1945.

⁸² Yohanna, Stephen. "Urban Labour in Nigeria: A Case Study of Labour Unions in Kaduna, 1944-2004." B.A. Research Essay, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2008: 6-7.

⁸³ Such firms includes Campagnie Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO) Or the French Company of West Africa, Maps (P.S. Mandrines), Patterson and Zochonis (PZ), Ollivant (OL), Senafrika, Western Sudan Exporters (WSE), Georges Calil, K. Maroun, J. Menguissoglou, and Raccah (Levantine firms). As contained in Olukoju, Ayodeji. "'Buy British, Sell Foreign': External Trade Control Policies in Nigeria during World War II and its aftermath, 1939-1950." 371-373; Waziri, Ibrahim M. "The Economy of British Borno: A Case Study of the Impact of Selected Commodities in the Emergence and Growth of a Cash Economy, 1902-1945." 115. Walter Rodney argues that CFAO, Societe Commerciale Ouest Africaine (SCOA), and UAC were considered most notorious in their direct contact with African peasants in expatriating a great proportion of Africa's wealth. See Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2012: 185.

agriculture, construction, industrial, and domestic labour.⁸⁴ Consequentially, the new economic opportunities which were created by European firms were destructive to the local economy as the process resulted in an outflow of people in their hundreds to work in the newly established enterprises as wage labourers.⁸⁵

For instance, the 1902 mineral proclamation which gave the British the right to explore the mineral potentials in tin, iron, wolfram, and gold, which are richly endowed in the region, led to the issuance of prospecting and mining licenses to European mining companies. This gave rise to the need for human labour especially for digging, washing, and transporting of the minerals exploited. As a result of this development, an advisory committee on manpower in the mining industries was set up with the view to imposing labour quotas on all districts in the provinces of Northern Nigeria.⁸⁶ The entrenchment of forced labour, which was not in any way accompanied by monetary remuneration, was deliberately encouraged by the colonial administration with the native chiefs serving as recruitment agents. W. R. Crocker who was a Northern Nigeria member of the colonial service observed:

*The District Heads 'force' the labour, every household has a quota ... At the end of a job ... the normal Hausa labourers go away without a penny ... Virtually no labourer has any real idea of what was due to him at the end of the month.*⁸⁷

The initial foundations of colonial infrastructures were said to have been established through the use of this form of labour which the British continually termed "political labour".⁸⁸ Construction of railways, military and police barracks, courts, prisons, offices, houses and rest houses for European officials, market stalls, telegraph lines, clearing of roads, and transporting the materials required in the various spheres of construction were largely achieved through the use of compulsory labour. This was necessitated by the fact that large and difficult tasks could be accomplished costing the state little or nothing. Arguably, the concentration of several railway lines, which passed through different directions on the plain

⁸⁴ Aurthur, John A. "International Labour Migration Patterns in West Africa". *African Studies Review*, Vol. 34, Issue 03 (Dec., 1991): 70-71; Sani, Abubakar B. "Raw Material Production for Export in Northern Nigeria: The Experience of the People of in the Livestock and Allied Industries under British Rule c. 1900-1960." *African Economic History*, Vol. 37 (2009):111.

⁸⁵ Mberu, Blessing U. "Who Moves and Who Stays?: Rural Out-Migration in Nigeria." *Journal of Population Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Sept., 2005): 141-142.

⁸⁶ Mukhtar, Mansur I. "British Colonial Labour policies and the Changing Roles of Labour in Kano Emirate, c. 1903-1960." Ph.D., Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1994: 319-320.

⁸⁷ See Shenton, Robert W. *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria*. 136.

⁸⁸ Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997: 174.

of Zaria province neighbouring a central mining zone in the Jos Plateau area of Northern Nigeria, contributed towards the rise of unpaid labour considering the large volume of work force that was put into its construction.⁸⁹

Worthy of note was that the British colonial labour policies were heavily criticized during the 14th International Labour Conference held in Geneva from 10 to 28 June 1930, although the colonial conference concluded that:

No pledge has been made to stop forced labour immediately and there would have to be a transition period, but the secretary of state had given instruction that in accordance with the convention regulations must be passed to govern any form of forced labour which remained.⁹⁰ ... While the use of forced labour on a large scale, for such works as Railway construction, could properly be abandoned and that, if the arrangements for recruiting and conditions of working were made satisfactory, voluntary labour adequate in quality and number would eventually be forthcoming.⁹¹

It is important to note that maintenance of native buildings such as the court, prison, and markets through “minor communal services” was backed by this promulgation. In a letter addressed to the secretary of the provinces of Northern Nigeria dated 15 August, 1931 in accordance with the directive of the governor, (Sgd) G. C. Whiteley (for chief secretary to the government), a written report was requested to explain in detail the degree to which the native chiefs still exploited forced or compulsory labour. This was because ‘forced labour was exacted by order of the central government, apart from carrier transport requisitioned in emergency conditions under the General Order 185’.⁹² This resolution banning the continuing use of forced labour did not go down well with the British colonial administrators as they opined that ‘you cannot say that forced labour shall cease for ever to-morrow’.⁹³ Such

⁸⁹ Toure, Kazah-Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960.” 213-214; See also Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. 174. Thus the construction of Port Harcourt and Baro-Kano rail lines in Northern Nigeria reached Zaria province between 1909 and 1911 from Kogin Sarkin Pawa.

⁹⁰ See NAK: Zaria Prof./ c.10A/1940 “Forced Labour ((Particular Cases) (1940)), Paragraph Eight.

⁹¹ NAK: Zaria Prof. c.10A/1940 “Forced Labour ((Particular Cases) (1940)).” Paragraph Two. See also Okene, Ademoh A. “The Transformation of Ebiraland, 1880-1960.” Ph.D., Department of History, Bayero University Kano (BUK), 1995: 225-226; Bello, Sule. *State and Economy in Kano c. 1894 to 1960: A Study of Colonial Domination*. 112-114. The use of forced labour on a large scale has earlier been discussed at conferences held in 1926 and 1927 respectively. Such was contained in a memorandum from the secretary, Northern provinces at Kaduna, to the Resident, Zaria province dated 19 December, 1931.

⁹² NAK: Zaria Prof.c.10/1940 “Forced Labour (Policy and Instructions) (1940).”

⁹³ See “Report of the Colonial Office Members of the Delegation of His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom.” In NAK: Zaria Prof.c.10/1940 “Forced Labour ((Policy and Instructions) (1940)).”

reluctance was clearly evident in a report from the colonial office in the United Kingdom which stated that:

*The main principles are that forced or compulsory labour must never be used except for important public interest; it must never be employed unless there is at the moment, or there is just to be, a real, absolute and convincing necessity for it; it is only to be used if it is quite impossible to obtain voluntary labour ...*⁹⁴

As slim as the dividing line between forced, migrant, and wage labour, which the colonial state relied on may seem, Kazah Toure argued that wage labour to some extent could also be regarded as compulsory with utterly meagre and negligible remuneration. Thus, the patronage enjoyed by either migrant or wage labourers can be argued to be largely due to the availability of good road networks which provided various wage earning opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labourers. The establishment of railway stations which no doubt had much to do with the agricultural prospects of Northern Nigeria attracted the services of many of the colonized people who engaged in part-time portering, re-bagging and stocking groundnuts, cotton sacks, loading of produce on trailers, stacking of the produce, and transferring produce from vehicles to railway wagons. Others were also employed to serve as guards in order to ensure the security of railway and trading stations. While some acted as cashiers for the produce-buying agents and the company stations, others served as clerks by assisting with the accounts and manning the scale.⁹⁵

However, increases in production during this period were achieved through the allocation of quotas to traditional rulers, non-syndicate firms, and local middlemen who were awarded bonuses upon attaining their set targets. With this practice the farmer was compelled to produce for the metropolitan population as there were efforts to repress local consumption and encourage exportation. A European official was quoted to have remarked that; 'it certainly should not be left to the choice of the individual farmer as to what crop he grows'.⁹⁶ From the early 1900s to 1944, it was estimated that about 38,328 tons of cotton were exported while the figure for groundnuts stood at 825,095 tons aside from other exportable

⁹⁴ See NAK: Zaria Prof. c.10/1940 "Forced Labour ((Policy and Instructions) (1940)), in 'Report of the Colonial Office Members of the Delegation of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom.'

⁹⁵ Mukhtar, Mansur I. "British Colonial Labour policies and the Changing Roles of Labour in Kano Emirate, c. 1903 to 1960." 309, 315-317.

⁹⁶ Olukoju, Ayodeji. "'Buy British, Sell Foreign': External Trade Control Policies in Nigeria during World War II and its Aftermath, 1939-1950". 372-373.

commodities.⁹⁷ As a result of the significance of these raw materials to the colonial government, those in the haulage business were supported by the colonial state, especially at the end of the Second World War, as it sought to speed up the evacuation of cottons, groundnuts and other exportable produce to the ports by way of importing and auctioning off to transporters the many military trucks that had been used during the war. Truck drivers, motor mates, motor mechanics, as well as thousands of labourers were employed by these transporters. Though in character the bulk of unskilled labour force was employed on a temporary and seasonal basis, this could be attributed largely to the high demand for labour during the harvest (produce) buying season, as a fraction of the temporal labour force retired back to their farms during the planting season.⁹⁸

Arguably, it can also be said that the incorporation and subordination of Northern Nigeria into the colonial economic system was achieved through the introduction of a single currency in the early twentieth century which was aimed at fostering the habit of cash transaction among the peasantry. This was accompanied by the imposition of a new system of taxation which the colonialists considered as a “morally good and civilizing” powerful tool for political control. A Major Tremearne put it:

*The payment of a fixed amount, in cash or kind, by a weak people to a strong has long been recognized as the sign of the acknowledgement of suzerainty, and it is enforced by the government of Northern Nigeria, not so much on account of the amount brought in ... but rather to remind the natives that we are the masters, and that we intend to keep them under control.*⁹⁹

To the merchant community, the newly imposed system of taxation, which could also be seen as an “unavoidable evil”, served as a powerful stimulant to labour and industry, as well as a good source for generating revenue towards the running and maintaining of colonial administration. In some cases, goods that were exportable, or easily convertible to cash, or food that could be issued as rations to law enforcement agents, or labour were accepted in lieu of cash.¹⁰⁰ The imposition of colonial taxation was also aimed at conditioning the colonized people to work as it was rightly stated here:

⁹⁷ See Ekundare, Olufemi R. *An Economy History of Nigeria 1860 to 1960*. 170-172.

⁹⁸ Mukhtar, Mansur I. “British Colonial Labour policies and the Changing Roles of Labour in Kano Emirate, c. 1903 to 1960”. 317-319.

⁹⁹ Turaki, Yusufu. *The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria*. 62.

¹⁰⁰ See Bello, Sule. *State and Economy in Kano c. 1894 to 1960: A Study of Colonial Domination*. 100-101.

*[The tax system] is not only to reimburse the government in some measure for the cost of occupying all the territories, and of providing protection for the native population. Taxes also have a higher purpose, which is to accustom the Negroes to work.*¹⁰¹

These colonial policies drove people into providing cheap labour on the farms, roads, construction, or mining sites, and expanding the cultivation of cash crops in order to transact business so as to discharge their tax obligations. This situation led to urban decay especially during the period of the Second World War and the economic recession that preceded it.¹⁰² It was reported in some quarters that many people fell ‘into the clutches of dubious creditors who took advantage to practice usury against their less privileged neighbours’.¹⁰³ On 12 August 1939 for instance, F. M. Noad (Sgd), who was the Resident of Zaria province, noted with dismay the alarming rates at which immigrants were thrown into an unfriendly township lifestyle. He complained about the number of juvenile offenders and destitute children who left their respective rural communities and flowed into townships ostensibly in search of work but instead engaged in pickpocketing and thieving as a means of livelihood as jobs were not forthcoming.¹⁰⁴ By 1940 there was a massive presence of jobseekers in the urban centres that led to their temporary conscription into the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) as non-commissioned officers and clerks so as to reduce their numbers.¹⁰⁵ But this measure did not effectively address the growing labour challenge caused by rural-urban outflow. E. A. Miller who was the commissioner for labour in Nigeria observed in 1943 that the flight to towns was already presenting difficulties of control and distribution, both in physical and psychological terms.

The Dialectics of Imperial Citizenship and the Forgotten Voice

At the moment of crisis, the conditions in Northern Nigeria became even more severe as another burden was added to the people in the form of war levies, which in effect was an additional tax. It was also argued that this period was characterized by ‘seizure of foodstuffs from the peasantry to feed British troops, as well as compulsory pay cuts for workers in the

¹⁰¹ Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. 179.

¹⁰² Oyedele, Enoch O. “The History for the Establishment of Kaduna, 1917-1957.” BA Project, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1977: 26, 29.

¹⁰³ Okene, Ademoh A. “The Transformation of Eberland, 1880-1960.” 222; Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*. 48.

¹⁰⁴ NAK:2653 ‘Juvenile Labour in Kaduna’, in “Legislation Regarding Labour Conditions”.

¹⁰⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof.2653A/ Labour Conditions – Annual Report on – in “Annual Report on Labour Conditions in Zaria province (1940-50).” There were also general complaints of poor sanitary conditions especially with regard to communal latrines in most of the labour mining camps inspected in 1940 such as sites located at Kagarko on the north Bank of River Ruzai, at Chori (Nok), among others.

form of the so-called contribution to the war fund',¹⁰⁶ aside from the conscription of young abled-bodied men into the army on the side of Britain to confront the Germans in the Cameroons.¹⁰⁷

In a related development, the colonialists expressed the hope that if an account could be opened and called '*The Nigeria Win the War Fund*', it would go a long way to assisting the British to purchase war materials such as machine guns, a tank or an aeroplane, an example drawn from Jamaica's £20,000 contribution to the purchase of an aeroplane used in the war.¹⁰⁸ In line with the suggestion, individuals, associations, native authorities, schools, and private enterprises responded to this call. By 18 June 1940, for instance, a cheque for £50 was handed to (Sgd.) E. S. Pembleton who was the Resident of Plateau province, by a private mine owner by the name of Mr. J. R. C. Stock in furtherance of the empire's war effort.¹⁰⁹ At this moment the general economy started feeling the impact of the war as such was noted in a circular signed by T. S. Adams who was the chief commissioner of Northern provinces on 19 June stating that items such as imported food, drink, clothing, building materials, among other articles were in very short supply.¹¹⁰ This notice corresponded with the earlier directive of the 18 January 1940 made available to all Northern provincial offices for control measures to be taken in petrol consumption so as to avoid purchases from America and unnecessarily adding to the difficulties arising from the conduct of the war.¹¹¹

On 24 July 1940 the government endorsed a proposal which included a provision for the masses to make small contributions as part of their war efforts. Just twelve weeks into the commencement of the war, G. O. Olusanya noted that cash amount of £12,000 was already realized.¹¹² By 2 September, the divisional office in Kafanchan had written to the Resident of Plateau province requesting that regular contributions of government employees to the "War Relief Fund (WRF)" be re-directed towards the "Win the War Fund (WWF)" to ensure the

¹⁰⁶ Toure, Kazah-Toure. "The Development of Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902 to 1960." 198.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter three and four of Oyedele, Enoch O. "Colonial Urbanisation in Northern Nigeria: Kaduna, 1913-1960." Ph.D., Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1987; Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. 143.

¹⁰⁸ NAK: Jos Prof./W.31 Extract from 'The Nigerian Daily Times' dated 15 June 1940, as contained in "Win the War Fund" (1940).

¹⁰⁹ NAK: Jos Prof.W.31 'War Effort: Contributions to.' As contained in "Win the War Fund" (1940).

¹¹⁰ NAK: Jos Prof./W.19 "General Economy" (1940).

¹¹¹ NAK: Jos Prof./W.5 "Control of Oil Supplies" (1939-40).

¹¹² Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Limited [for] University of Lagos, 1973: 45.

war victory, which was a campaign aimed at exterminating what they termed ‘*Hitlerism*’.¹¹³ Such propaganda was used by the Nigerian governor-general in his message to the people when he stated that:

*In such a time as this I am glad to be able to say that there is no more loyal people in the whole British Empire than the Nigerians. They showed this in the crises last September and they are again showing it now, particularly in the way they have come to enlist in the local defence forces, and have volunteered in large numbers to give assistance in any possible way.*¹¹⁴

He further requested the people to always respond to government calls for services, and remain obedient at all time in discharging their daily tasks which was in line with the British war slogan of “business as usual”,¹¹⁵ signs that the colonial government regarded as a definition of true loyalty. By December the Yoruba (community) association had initiated the ‘Grand Athletic Sports Competition’ at the cost of 6d per head for participation with winners to be awarded the “Victory Badge” which would signify practical proof of loyalty to the British Empire in aid of the “WWF”. Similarly the Urhobo community decided that half of the proceeds realized from the 26 December ‘Masquerade Dance’ would go into same treasury.¹¹⁶

As far as contributing toward winning the war is concerned, Northern Nigeria played a significant role. In 1942 for instance, Kano province alone contributed £10,270 in which £5,000 was earmarked for the purchase of a *spitfire fighter plane*, and in 1945 the sum of £31,400 was realized in the same province.¹¹⁷ Also, members of the African committee on War Charities Fortnight (WCF) after their meeting on 13 February 1945 at Rayfield in the Jos province raised the sum of £157. 10. 8 which was categorised to be given to the Nigerian Red Cross (NRC), Nigerian Forces Comforts Fund (NFCF), and the Nigerian Disabled Soldiers Fund (NDSF).¹¹⁸ On the 27 February 1945 an announcement was made through Rex Cinema to show appreciation to those who contributed to the amount of £3,363. 16. 2 following the

¹¹³ Several propagandas have been employed by the colonialists and a clear example of such was contained in ‘Message from His Excellency the Governor to the people of Nigeria,’ dated 3 September, 1940. See NAK: Jos Prof.W.6 “Nigeria War Efforts” (1939-40).

¹¹⁴ NAK: Jos Prof./W.6 “Nigeria War Efforts” (1939-40). In Message from His Excellency the governor to the people of Nigeria.

¹¹⁵ NAK: Jos Prof.W.6 “Nigeria War Efforts” (1939-40).

¹¹⁶ NAK: Jos Prof./W.31 “Win the War Fund” (1940).

¹¹⁷ Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. 45-46.

¹¹⁸ NAK: Jos Prof.W.31/S.1 “War Charities Fortnight Plateau province.” (1944).

request of the committee zonal chairman.¹¹⁹ From 18 September 1939 to 28 January 1946, the sum of £210,944 was realized as Nigeria contribution to the WRF; this was aside from contributions made for other purposes.¹²⁰ In all, Addulkarim Umar Dan- Asabe argues that the sum of £6,000,000 was realized as the Nigerian monetary contribution to Britain in fighting the war by stating that ‘the West African Currency Board in effect lent money to Britain by holding its reserves in British Securities’.¹²¹

It is important to note that even as workers continued to feel the effect of economic hardship posed by the war, the colonialists remained determined in their bid to mobilize aid in support of the war. The colonized workers’ participation in winning the war effort was prompted by the use of several propaganda campaigns among which was by the widely-held notion that the war was fought to debunk Fascist and Nazi supremacist ideology and to ensure the equality of all people irrespective of nationality or complexion. It was in anticipation of better living and freedom from subjugation that the colonized workers made this “sacrifice” despite the economic hardship. Commenting on the general scale of salaries and wages of African workers in relation to their European counterparts during this period, in 1941 for instance, *The Pilot* observed that; ‘... Everywhere men live on the borderline of poverty and in some cases poverty is even the rule of their existence. This should be changed for the better. That is one of the rights we demand as part of the promised new order.’¹²² But in spite of the war era challenges, the cry of the workers for improvement in their condition of service was not attended to. Instead the colonial office through Sydney Caine who was the head of its economic department claimed that the population of Britain would reject any attempt to augment the colonized people’s standard of living at the expense of the colonial state.¹²³

With all the challenges that accompanied the war period, especially an increase in the cost of living in urban areas, the wages of unskilled workers in the military in Northern Nigeria remained stagnant at 5d-8d per diem in Zaria and 6d per diem in Kaduna in 1941, a rate that the residents considered not reasonable as it did not allow for marriage, families, or any scope

¹¹⁹ NAK: Jos Prof.W. 31/S.1 “War Charities Fortnight Plateau Province.” (1944).

¹²⁰ Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. 46.

¹²¹ Dan-Asabe, Abdulkarim U. “Kano Labour and the Kano Poor, 1930-1990.” Ph.D., Department of History, Bayero University, Kano, 1996: 128.

¹²² Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. 61.

¹²³ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British West Africa*. 130-135.

for special functions.¹²⁴ Reasonably habitable houses became scarce and rentals rose to astronomic heights. The average rent of a low paid worker (a labourer) was 3/- for one room while a government official and railway worker paid 15/- for two rooms. Although rent was largely determined by the type of quarters occupied and the status of the occupier, what remained enormous in either case was the percentage increase (about 73%) when one compared the pre-war and war period house rents.¹²⁵ Most of the occupants had to relocate from time to time due to the highly prevailing deplorable cost of living occasioned by the rise in market prices of essential commodities despite the unchanged salary and wage structure. Also important to point out here was that high rentals, stagnant salaries and wages, and urban explosion meant that habitable houses could only be afforded by workers in the higher pay brackets who often had to accommodate, apart from their immediate families, all sorts of relatives who travelled to the urban centres in search of careers, which were in many instances not obtainable. This resulted to a massive growth of congested and squalid tenement buildings to accommodate large numbers of people in poor living and sanitary conditions.¹²⁶

From 1940 to 1941 prices of goods and services skyrocketed as markets also ran out of supplies. In an effort to accommodate price fluctuations, the colonial government adjusted the allowances of European expatriates by introducing the “separation allowance” for those whose families lived outside Nigeria and “local allowance” for those who had their wives with them.¹²⁷ Even as only three-quarter’s of the “local allowance” was allocated to the few Africans within the higher ranks, the colonial administrators were reluctant to increase the wages of their African counterparts. This policy was not welcomed by the African workers who lamented that ‘it took only two men to increase the allowances of Europeans, but it takes a Commission of Enquiry to get anything for Africans’.¹²⁸ The NCSU was quoted as having

¹²⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof. 3535/S.1 “Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings.” (1937-43).

¹²⁵ See ‘Schedule showing Pre-war and Current House Rent in Zaria Township, 8 June, 1942’, in NAK: Zaria Prof. 3535/S.1 “Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings” (1937-43).

¹²⁶ The situation remained almost the same all over colonial Africa especially during the war period as it became considerably difficult for salary and wage earners to maintain a satisfactory standard of living. A clearer instance is contained in Phimister, I. and Raftopoulos, B. ““*Kana sora ratswa ngaritswe*”: African Nationalists and Black Workers – The 1948 General Strike in Colonial Zimbabwe”. 289.

¹²⁷ Ore, T. O. “Industrial Relations Orthodoxy or Political Exchange: An Examination of Strike Activity in Colonial Nigeria”. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Oct., 1988): 193.

¹²⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof. 3535/S.1 in ‘Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants’ Technical Workers’ Union, June-August 1945’, “Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of

claimed in a memorandum that, while 14,886 African civil servants were earning a total of £998,640 as wages annually, the sum of £1,077,390 was paid to 1,631 European officials.¹²⁹

As noted above, a commission to investigate the cost of living in the urban centres was constituted and released its report in mid-1942 after months of strenuous complaints and agitations from the press and African Civil Servants Technical Workers Union (ACSTWU), an umbrella group representing most government employees. A 100% increase in the minimum wage was won in 1942 due to the granting of a COLA. Not pleased with how Bernard Henry Bourdillon, the governor-general of Nigeria, handled the workers' issues, a minute from the colonial office referred to him as "querulous" and behaving 'like a child who cannot get the toy he wants'.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, this COLA was eventually rendered worthless when viewed against the drastic and progressive fall in the real incomes which occurred due to the uncontrolled inflation of the war years. Within the period of one year, from June 1942 to June 1943, the cost of living index in Kaduna as well as other urban centres in Nigeria increased greatly by 200%.¹³¹ This moment can be said to represent the nadir of workers' livelihoods in colonial Nigeria. It can also be argued that farmers who still produced their own food and offered some for cash during this period were doing considerably better compared to the urban worker despite reported cases of their produce having been confiscated. An official from the colonial office, while commenting on the Nigerian general strike of 1945, stated that 'the peasant farmer for once has the advantage over the clerk and the industrial worker on fixed wages'.¹³² Consequently in response to the sharp increase in the cost of living index, ACSTWU in 1943 called for a cost of living adjustment. But the government only responded to this by setting up a committee headed by Captain A. P. Pullen which was saddled with the responsibility of ensuring the control of the prices of foodstuff especially gari, salt among few items.¹³³

Employment Minutes of Meetings" (1937-43). Also see NAK: Zaria Prof. "(i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest"(1945-49).

¹²⁹ Lindsay, Lisa A. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenships in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike". 790.

¹³⁰ Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British West Africa*. 134.

¹³¹ Abba, Alkasum. "The Significance of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the Politics of Nigeria, 1950-1960". 64.

¹³² Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British West Africa*. 123-124.

¹³³ Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. 63-64.

In view of the continuous rise in the general cost of living, ACSTWU forwarded a petition on the 28 March 1945, demanding that an adjustment in the COLA be paid retrospectively from the 1 April, 1944 with (i) a daily minimum wage of 2/6, (ii) COLA 50% increment for subordinate grades, and (iii) a standard of scale in the following order:

Scale (£)	48 - 128	137 - 220	240 - 300	310 - 400	420 - 600
COLA per month (£)	3	2. 10. 0.	2. 0. 0.	1. 10. 0.	1. 54

SOURCE: NAK: Zaria Prof.4082 Vol. 1; 3535/S.1 (As contained in ACSTWU Memo).

On 26 April 1945, N. E. Whiting (Sgd) who was the controller for local foodstuffs stated that: 'In May 1944, the District Officer (DO), Jos informed me the wholesale price of Pepper was 42/-- 47/-- bag. In April 1945 he informed me it is 135/-'.¹³⁴ The price of gari, which was the staple food, had to be controlled by the Captain A. P. Pullen-led committee and imported into the Northern provinces from the Southern provinces of Nigeria. This measure was accompanied by farmers' loss of interest in cassava cultivation as well as gari production by local producers due to its strenuous production process.¹³⁵ As such gari, the 'common man's' food became scarce, alongside other essential goods such as salt,¹³⁶ milk, bread, pepper, among others. To this, the colonial government argued that unless the black market was broken and all cases of profiteering reported, the increase in COLA would only result in further price rises rather than solving the problem. ACSTWU on 21 May 1945 forwarded its resolution in Lagos, drawing the attention of the colonial government to the recurring increments in European allowances considered detrimental to the African workers who were in most cases left out. Moreover ACSTWU argued that unless their demands were granted in full not later than the 21 June the Nigerian workers would 'seek their own remedy, with due regard to law and order on the one hand and starvation on the other hand'.¹³⁷ Mr G. F. T. Colby who was the acting chief secretary on the side of the Nigerian government met with the unions' delegation on 30 May and explained the government position to them. In another letter, dated 1 June 1945, ACSTWU rebutted the government arguments and demanded an

¹³⁴ NAK: Jos Prof. W.57/ "Controls of Movement of foodstuffs prices" (1943-49).

¹³⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof.3535/S.1. "Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings" (1937-43).

¹³⁶ Falola, Toyin. "'Salt is Gold': The Management of Salt Scarcity in Nigeria during World War II". *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 26, Issue 3 (1992): 414-417.

¹³⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1. "Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings" (1937-43).

upward revision of the existing rates of COLA, cancellation of local allowances granted to African staff, and a minimum labour wage rate of at least 2/6 a day.

The release of Michael Imoudu who was the acclaimed hero of the 1942 COLA “victory” from Auchi where he was imprisoned since January 1943, served as a booster to the workers. On 11 June, the colonial government made a written reply to ACSTWU demands, arguing that an increment in wages would only further aggravate inflation and privation, thereby placing the non-wage class at a disadvantage. The government further argued that drastic measures had already been taken to checkmate the activities of black marketeers so as to cushion the effect of the hardship caused by the war. But the Pullen scheme had not achieved this owing to the opposition it suffered from both market women and the populace whose concern was to frustrate any form of exploitation rather than reporting cases of profiteering.¹³⁸ By 18 June the unions’ representatives stated clearly that: ‘Unless the workers’ demands are fully met by noon on Thursday, the 21 June, 1945, there shall be a total strike of government workers throughout Nigeria, effective from midnight of that date’.¹³⁹

In responding to the striking action threat by the workers union, the chief secretary, on the same date, argued that such action would be illegal as it contravened the general defence regulation stipulated under the War-time Emergency Regulation 156 of Part VIII. His argument was supported in a broadcast made by His Excellency a day after.¹⁴⁰ Even though the momentum for a strike was at an advanced stage, after much persuasion from government, some kingpins within the union, led by T. A. Bankole, a former joint executive chairman, informed the workers during an eleventh hour meeting on 20 June at Lagos that the industrial action would be unlawful under the war time regulation act. The workers, alongside Michael Imoudu who rose from the rank and file of the Nigerian railway to champion the 1942 struggle that led to the eventual award of COLA, felt they had been betrayed, thereby repudiating their leaders, accusing them of receiving a bribe, as they were said to have shouted; ‘[T]hief, thief, you have been bribed; the government has bribed you’.¹⁴¹ At this

¹³⁸ Olusanya, G. O. *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*. 64.

¹³⁹ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1. “Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings” (1937-43).

¹⁴⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1. “Provincial Standing Committee on Wages, Cost of Living, and Condition of Employment Minutes of Meetings” (1937-43).

¹⁴¹ Lindsay, A. Lisa. “Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike”, 798.

stage the situation had got out of control and the strike commenced at midnight of 21 June 1945.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the means through which labour was mobilized and controlled in colonial Northern Nigeria. It also explored how the colonial state restructured the local economy to suit its capitalist model. This was done by way of introducing a single currency, new forms of taxation, and encouraging the cultivation of cash and exportable crops. The introduction of these policies, in addition to the establishment of commercial enterprises by the expatriates in urban centres, resulted in a massive influx of labourers from rural areas to the cities to take advantage of the wage earning opportunities. The mass presence of job seekers in the urban areas constituted a great challenge to both the colonialists and the privileged African salary and wage earners who were faced with the tasks of accommodating the army of unemployed. The situation worsened when the world was thrown into the Second World War. During the war period young men were conscripted into the army to fight the war, food items were confiscated from producers to feed the army, while wage earners, traders, native authorities, and individuals were compelled to contribute toward winning the war with the belief that their contribution was for the liberation of mankind from Hitler's domination.

At the same time, however, there was stagnation in salaries and wage structures of African workers whereas a separate allowance was granted to their European counterparts. There was also stagnation of low business activity, scarcity of essential commodities and sharp increases in the prices of imported products, heavy unemployment, and lower industrial production during this period. Additionally there was a catastrophic fall in the prices of exportable produce in European markets and peasant producers received less for their crops. The situation led to a fall in incomes, alteration in the modality of taxation, limited money in circulation, and a general decline in the standard of living of ordinary Nigerians. Habitable houses became scarce and rentals rose to astronomic heights. It was argued that the combination of wage erosion and discrimination in the face of economic privation, as well as the failure of the colonial government to review the cost of living provoked the industrial action by the African workers in June 1945. The chapter argues that it is only by analysing the economic significance and potentials of Northern Nigeria as well as examining its

political economy alongside its politics of production that this labour struggle in the provinces of Northern Nigeria can be better understood.



CHAPTER THREE

Rethinking the General Strike in Northern Nigeria

Introduction

As I have noted in the previous chapter, it was the incorporation of the indigenous economy into the capitalist system that led to the mass movement of people to urban centres to offer labour for cash that provoked mass participation in unionization, while the economic developments associated with Second World War provided a more immediate context. Examining the imperial economic restructuring up to the end of the Second World War offers us a clearer understanding of the diverging and contested views on workers and anti-colonial struggles that dominated existing literatures. This study provided a platform through which the economic crisis that prompted industrial action can be better understood. The study further interrogates the long-held notion of “complete solidarity” among the colonized labourers so as to ascertain the degree of co-operation among the colonized workers during the industrial dispute.

As also discussed in the preceding chapter, one of the significant events in the history of anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria was the strike that was embarked upon by African government employees from late June to early August 1945. This arose as a result of the deteriorating working and living conditions, alongside the refusal of the colonial government to heed the workers’ unions representatives calls for an upward review of COLA in the face of economic adversity. The strike was regarded as an outcome of the economic impediments shaped by the policies of the British administration’s commitment to the war effort, a commitment that placed a burden on African wage earners and the local economy. Although attempts have been made by Abba, Freund, and Toure among others to examine the unfolding of this event and its significance for the Nigeria labour movement, unfortunately the widely held approach employed by some of these writers tends to be sympathetic in recounting the workers’ action as remarkably “successful” with little or no attention given to the complexities that characterized such an eventful development.

This chapter provides a more nuanced account of the strike, raising questions on tactics both of the colonial government and the colonized African workers employed as a response to the menacing situation. This will be done by critically analysing questions relating to the initiation of the strike vis-à-vis responses to the threatened strike by both the colonial state

and the imperial citizens which aimed at derailing the workers action in Northern Nigeria. This attempts to bring into focus issues that have not received sufficient attention especially from the preceding works of Alkasum Abba and Kazah Toure among others.¹⁴² These scholars' focused on the question of steadfastness and solidarity among the colonized people in Northern Nigeria as a key feature of the industrial action, thereby giving insufficient attention to how different camps responded to the industrial dispute. Doing so could shed more light on the dynamics of popular struggle in the history of labour and the anti-colonial movement, not only in the Northern region but the whole of Nigeria. The chapter sets to examine the role of government contingency arrangement in explaining the strike; it will question the form of relationship that transpired among workers, other imperial citizens, and the imperial government during this period; it will also show the impact of the longer term structural development of the economy on the industrial dispute.

The Government Establishment of Committees to Co-ordinate Activities in the Course of a Strike

One significant aspect which most writers failed to reckon with in their attempts to discuss the 1945 general strike is the question relating to how government responded to the workers threat. Examining how the government embarked on an industrial war by constituting "strike committees" at various levels to co-ordinate their response to the strike may offer a clearer insight into the labour unrest. The committees' establishment, to ensure service provision during the industrial dispute, confirmed government awareness of an industrial action and its readiness to contend with the situation.

It was observed that as the economic suffering increased, exacerbated by Britain's participation in the Second World War, African workers through their union representatives forwarded a resolution to the office of the colonial authority demanding an increase in COLA. This notification was followed by a general strike warning which was scheduled to take place just in case their demands were not met. But ironic as it appeared to be, it can be argued that appropriate attention was not given to the workers plight; rather, whereas the union's frontrunners were busy putting forward their agitations with the aim of improving their working and living conditions, the colonial officials, in anticipation of a strike, resolved to constitute committees that would coordinate actions should industrial action commence,

¹⁴² See Abba, Alkasum. "The Significance of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the Politics of Nigeria, 1950-1960." 63-68; Toure, Kazah-Toure. "The Development of Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960." 396-408.

and further identified those to be called upon to provide valuable assistance by ensuring the continued functioning of essential facilities.¹⁴³

To perform according to their plan, requests were made on 4 June 1945 to local rulers for additional Yandoka (native authority police) who would collaborate with other law enforcement agencies within their various Northern provinces with the intention of preventing the situation from going beyond the control of the civil power. The assistant commissioner of police in Kaduna while reacting to this request made by the superintendent of police in charge of Zaria for the deployment of more troops to valuable points observed in a letter that:

*In re-considering the matter you should not dissipate your available men in small parties of two, three etc., but should cut your valuable points down instead. For example what makes you think that in the event of a general strike the strikers will attack Hospital, or the Middle School? However I do not propose to dictate to the Resident exactly which places should become valuable points or their order of priority.*¹⁴⁴

Be that as it may, the government at this moment was more concerned with how to utilize the labour within its reach. By 8 June, the acting secretary of the Northern provinces in a 'priority telegram' to the Residents charged the native administrators to provide the needed labour in the field of the railway in the event of a strike. He stated that Jos, which had the highest concentration of mining sites, required twenty-five manual labourers; Kaduna junction, as the administrative headquarters of Northern Nigeria, was allotted forty manual workers; Kafanchan was allotted twenty-five labourers; fifty men were apportioned to Kano which was the largest supplier of groundnuts; twenty labourers were required at Makurdi; and Minna was also assigned twenty labourers, with the Running Shed Foreman, Assistant Traffic Officer, District Traffic Superintendent, or a Traffic Inspector to function as officers in charge.¹⁴⁵

The government further constituted a committee comprised of the Residents or Acting, Provincial Engineers, District Officers, Superintendents of Police, and a Chief or Deputy

¹⁴³ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 'General Strike, June, 1945. Establishment of Committee to Co-ordinate action', and 'Maintenance of Essential Services, dated 7 June, 1945' in "General Strike" (1945). Secret Reports.

¹⁴⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 "General Strike" (1945). See 'Secret letter addressed to The Superintendent of Police, Zaria'.

¹⁴⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 "General Strike Nigeria" (1945). See Acting Secretary of the Northern provinces confidential letter to the Resident of Zaria province.

Traffic Superintendent to represent all departments within a province who would work in close cooperation to ensure the effective running of basic services.¹⁴⁶ It should also be noted that twenty-six days after the workers' union forwarded its resolution to the governor-general's office in Lagos, on 16 June arrangements were already concluded for the manning of essential services such as electricity and water supply, as well as adequate disposition of troops at strategic and valuable points in connection with the public utility services.

In conjunction with the arrangements put in place, guidelines were also presented to heads of departments (HODs) on 23 June on how events would be conducted in the course of the industrial action. The colonial authority was likewise compelled to issue notices to all Europeans in Northern Nigeria urging them to readily avail themselves to render support so as to maintain essential services in the event of the African government workers commencing a general strike.¹⁴⁷ Europeans were accordingly informed that their private vehicles would be required for effective communication where it become necessary, while some would act as special constables when the situation warranted it.¹⁴⁸ Apparently, it can be argued that the idea of government constituting committees which would coordinate activities in the course of a strike, to an extent centred on the economic significance of the Northern provinces of Nigeria. And this was also in view of the need to ensure the accumulation and subsequent dispersion of specifically groundnuts, cotton and other exportable resources from Northern Nigeria to the coast for subsequent shipment for the Britain industrial expansion needs. This was because aside for the purpose of ensuring the functioning of essential amenities, the railway station was particularly identified as a crucial area where labour would be required for the easy flow of raw materials. Unfortunately these prearrangements initiated by the government in expectation of a strike were either not taken into consideration as the case was with Abba, or regarded as "not successful" by Toure.¹⁴⁹ But identifying and analysing this development may perhaps give further insight into the lukewarm reaction of the colonial state to workers' demands.

¹⁴⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 'General Strike, June, 1945, Secret Notice to All Europeans', in "General Strike" (1945).

¹⁴⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 'Notes for the Guidance of Heads of Departments in the Event of Strike Action being taken by their Employees', in "General Strike" (1945).

¹⁴⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike Nigeria." See paragraph one which corresponded with memo dated 8 June, 1945.

¹⁴⁹ Kazah-Toure, Toure. "The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province." 400.

Nature of the Strike Execution amongst Workers

By midnight of 21 June a strike was declared by the Nigerian Technical Workers Union (NTWU), the Nigerian Civil Servants Union (NCSU) and other affiliate unions in protest against the government's refusal to heed their demand for a wage increment after years of acute inflation.¹⁵⁰ This action started dramatically with the railway service coming to a complete standstill at midnight of 21 June, followed by the continuous blowing of train whistles by the railway loco drivers, thus sending a confirmatory signal to other government African workers that the strike had begun.¹⁵¹ On the 22 June, in the provinces of Northern Nigeria, it was reported that the Public Works Department's (PWD) technical staff alongside clerks stayed off their duties. On the same day in the agricultural department a shortage of labour was reported and European volunteers in addition to military personnel took control of the telephone among other services.¹⁵² Even though some workers completely shunned their work environment entirely, joining their leaders in carrying out union activities instead, it was observed that in some departments quite a number of the African government employees turned out at the premises of their workplaces only to be seen in groups conversing instead of carrying out their usual duties.¹⁵³

It was observable that the committees constituted by the colonial authority to coordinate actions in the course of the industrial action yielded results a few days into the strike to such an extent that the striking workers were said to be overwhelmed with surprise as to how the colonialists managed to maintain the functioning of some public utilities. But since the leadership of the striking workers desired a total lock-out, they intensified their efforts to frustrate the colonial authority by initiating a new strategy of championing a campaign directed at preventing market vendors from selling food items to the Europeans.¹⁵⁴ The introduction of such measures began to produce a domino effect particularly in the provinces of Northern Nigeria as Europeans' servants began to undergo uncommon difficulties in making their daily purchases.¹⁵⁵ By 24 June the situation led to a major deterioration in a number of sectors of the public utilities, specifically in the waterworks department. Within

¹⁵⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 'General Strike, June, 1945, see Secret Notice to All Europeans', in "General Strike" (1945).

¹⁵¹ Lindsay, A. Lisa. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike." 795; Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 701.

¹⁵² NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 'Notes for the Guidance of Heads of Departments in the Event of Strike Action being taken by their Employees.' In "General Strike" (1945).

¹⁵³ Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 701.

¹⁵⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in paragraph two of "General Strike Nigeria" (1945).

¹⁵⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945. See 'Situation at 10 a.m.' in "General Strike Nigeria" (1945).

the Zaria province for example, the European volunteers at this phase were reported to have showed signs of almost completely backing out by leaving only two junior staff, one a Hausa speaker, but in this case the army intervened by providing the necessary technical assistance in both the waterworks and power plant.¹⁵⁶ On 3 July an act of sabotage, which brought about the derailment of a passenger train from Kano ten miles north of Lagos, was reported. This led to the eventual detention of some of the supposed ring-leaders,¹⁵⁷ who upon their release admonished their members, calling on them not to interfere with any state property in the course of the industrial dispute.

Furthermore, in an effort to uphold the unity of the striking workers, the union's leadership on their own part held several closed-door meetings to map out channels aimed at curtailing the suffering of the strikers. One of such measures was taken at a meetings held on 30 June at which a circular was passed asking for votes of 2/- each to be given to the strikers as succour, but this proposition was vehemently opposed by others who believed it was too infinitesimal and instead suggested that any reasonable amount be granted as a loan to strikers.¹⁵⁸ The atmosphere at this stage was said to have been characterized by anxiety particularly on the question related to how to lessen the hardship of the workers, considering the unwillingness of government to engage in any form of negotiation with the labour unions' representatives.¹⁵⁹

This scenario posed a challenge to the workers' representatives who resolved to seek community support from well-wishers so as to checkmate any striker's wish to return to work as a result of financial problems. Their appeal was heard and attended to in some quarters, as it was reported that some members of the African clerical staff who did not participate in the strike from the outset provided the sum of £200 to the union leaders when they received their June salaries.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Dr Dikko who was with the African Hospital in Zaria, secretly

¹⁵⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945. See paragraph three of "General Strike Nigeria" (1945).

¹⁵⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1 in "Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945." Also see NAK: Zaria Prof. 4028 Vol. 1. (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49).

¹⁵⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945). See 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 3 July, 1945.

¹⁵⁹ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945). See 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 5 July, 1945.

¹⁶⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 30 June, 1945.

donated the sum of £20 as his way of exhibiting solidarity to the workers call,¹⁶¹ while another contribution in the sum of £47/17 was declared by the union at a different gathering.¹⁶² The technical workers union in Zaria having been assuaged by this development thereafter delegated Mr Lawanson of the PWD and Mr Olaye who was an engine driver to embark on a spying mission to Kaduna, Kano, and other Northern provinces to investigate how things were unfolding in order to keep them abreast, but in the course of carrying out their assignment these representatives were said to have been challenged by the law enforcement agency at Challawa within the province of Kano.¹⁶³

Nonetheless, taking into account the initial phase of the strike, there was evidence that some strikers returned to their various places of work in an effort to discredit the industrial action by regarding it as “unlawful”.¹⁶⁴ These actions neither seriously affected the determination of the African striking workers in pursuing their demands, nor did it lead to an end to the industrial action,¹⁶⁵ instead it encouraged the strikers to intensify their effort to tackle the “anti-workers coalition”. Worthy to note was the bravery exhibited by E. Ukoma who was the RWU Northern district president, the general-secretary E. B. Olojo, as well as Atakoro amongst others northern leaders in not only coordinating activities among the railway workers within the Zaria province which was the headquarters of RWU, but extending their supervision of the striking action beyond to other departments in Funtua, Gusua, Kaduna, and Kano.¹⁶⁶ They did this by traveling on bicycles in order to update the strikers on the position of the industrial action and to solicit assistance either in cash or in kind from their fellow compatriots. Appeals were also extended to local traders and business owners for financial support, and to apartment-owners not to demand rent payments from African striking workers.¹⁶⁷ This step was taken so as to lessen the economic suffering of the strikers during the period that the industrial action lasted. Moreover, there are indications that sympathisers

¹⁶¹ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Intelligence Report’ by Cpl John Odiase dated 1 July, 1945.

¹⁶² NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Intelligence Report’ by Cpl John Odiase dated 3 July, 1945.

¹⁶³ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Intelligence Report’ by Sgt Okonkwo dated 5 July, 1945.

¹⁶⁴ Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 701.

¹⁶⁵ Ore, T. O. “Industrial Relations Orthodoxy or Political Exchange: An Examination of Strike Activity in Colonial Nigeria.” 194.

¹⁶⁶ Kazah-Toure, Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960.” 404-405; Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 703.

¹⁶⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945). See ‘Intelligence Report’ by Sgt Okonkwo dated 30 June, 1945; Kazah-Toure, Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960.” 406; Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 704.

of the African workers who participated in acts of work stoppage were in some instances interrogated by the law enforcement agencies. This was the case with Bawa who was a businessman whom the electrical branch of the workers union in Zaria confirmed was summoned by the police on the 9 July.¹⁶⁸

However, the supporting role of members of the populace for the industrial action was considered by some writers as ‘a signal of the high level of solidarity the people extended to the strikers’.¹⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the said support received from the trading or service rendering populace, it can be argued that the anticipated benefits, which would accrue to the local economy from an increase in the take-home pay of the wage earning population, lay at the heart of this support. The existence of close family links triggered frequent migratory flow into the urban centres in pursuit of employment. The mass influx of job-seekers into the cities compelled the colonial government to instruct their employees to exert their influence by making sure their kith and kin relocate to their various rural abodes and carry on with the agricultural practises.¹⁷⁰ While the government thought that such a step would lessen the burden on the African workers, the rural dwellers, farmers, and traders on the other hand considered the wage earners ‘as their “children” for whom every blessing should be wished rather than as alien competitors who should perish in their municipal habitation’.¹⁷¹ Such sentiment was shared among other supporters especially those in the business circle who believed that there would be an upsurge in the prices of goods as the striking workers would be able to command higher purchasing power once any increase in wages was made. Besides, it was also observed that; ‘one tailor was reported as saying that he would be pleased to see the workers get more COLA, even if this did mean an increase in rates, as then the clerks would be able to pay his bills and buy more clothes.’¹⁷² This self-interest was indeed espoused by many of the supporters in their efforts to squeeze more out of government. Another point that is worth mentioning here and which was instrumental in sustaining the strike especially in the provinces of Northern Nigeria and which on the pages of Abba and Toure’s work received no attention was the engagement of coercive tactics by strikers. Such

¹⁶⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945). See ‘Intelligence Report’ by Sgt Okonkwo dated 10 June, 1945.

¹⁶⁹ Kazah-Toure, Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960.” 406.

¹⁷⁰ Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 700.

¹⁷¹ Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 699-700.

¹⁷² NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. 4028 Vol. 1. (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See ‘Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants’ Technical Workers’ Union, June-August 1945.’

actions were taken against co-workers who opted to go to work following the Nigerian government's incessant calls for the striking workers to resume work and the subsequent issue of a declaration that 1 August 1945 was the deadline for which the jobs of striking workers would be guaranteed should they return to work.¹⁷³ In the pre-lunch hours of the said date, cases of strikers molesting co-workers at Sabon Gari, Zaria, were reported to the police commissioner in Lagos and the Kaduna station Assistant Police Commissioner (APC) stated that:

Clerk was going to his place of work when they (two accused persons) came up to him and told him to go back. The clerk ignored them and continued on his way, so the two accused attacked him, one with a walking stick and the other slapping him with his hand. The clerk immediately took to his heed and ran towards the NA Police Charge Office which was close by, hotly pursued by the two men who continued to beat him while he ran. Three NA Police saw what was going on, so ran to the spot and arrested the two men. The clerk received slight injuries and had to attend hospital.¹⁷⁴

Government Efforts Aimed at Defeating the Workers Strike

As the industrial action commenced, diverse measures were deployed aimed at defeating the workers action either through the application of force or the use of bait for the African wage earners. This was apart from responses to government pleas to Europeans in the Northern provinces of Nigeria to render valuable assistance by ensuring the manning of essential public services during the strike in an attempt to lessen the effect of the action. The measures taken can be attributed to the economic importance of the area to foreign merchants which stimulated some agents of these expatriate firms to equally act as volunteers during the strike.

As evidence of this argument, it was on record that among the Europeans who acted as volunteers were Mr Edwards who was on the staff of John Holt, and Mr Cuthbertson as personnel of the UAC who were enrolled as special constables alongside other Europeans. Mr Fraser who worked with the BCGA and Mr Gilbert Brown of Samaru were registered for power station duty, while Mr Meredith of the Bank of British West Africa (BBWA) was enlisted for the waterworks in the pumping station in collaboration with other personnel to carry out any duty including carrying water turnkeys. Such examples were in line with the

¹⁷³ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 in 'General Strike Nigeria – Labour Unrest', see 'Confidential telegraph by N. M. Ffrench (Sgd.), Zaria Superintendent of Police to the Commissioner, The Nigerian Police', dated 7 August, 1945.

¹⁷⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 in 'General Strike Nigeria – Labour Unrest', see 'Confidential telegraph by N. M. Ffrench (Sgd.)'.

goal of the government's "general strike committees".¹⁷⁵ Wives of the resident Europeans were not left out as they were in some instance purported to have taken control of the telephone switchboard.¹⁷⁶ In order to ease the strain, a regular roster was worked out by European officials.

On 25 June, all the African supervisors of southern origin were believed to have left Northern Nigeria to reunite with their family members.¹⁷⁷ At this stage it became glaringly obvious to the colonialists that a labour force was needed to keep some sectors of the public utilities alive, and to handle the flow of imported consumer goods and export produce, especially the cotton and groundnut crops from the provinces of Northern Nigeria; this was in short supply as a result of difficulties involved in replacing the striking work-force.¹⁷⁸ An example of this was in the railway department, the largest single employer of wage labour throughout the colonial period,¹⁷⁹ with almost 100% of the labour force in its workshop as skilled workers.¹⁸⁰ The colonial officials mindful of the consequences, which the actions by the African striking workers would have, did come up with propaganda to lure the strikers back to their respective workplace. For instance, G. D. Pitcairn who was the Acting Resident of Zaria province was quoted to have said in a notice addressed to the strikers that:

*I realise that demands have been made upon a large number of government servants by unions of which they are members, to cease work in support of a request by the unions for greatly increased Cost of Living Allowance. Many of you have joined the strike in the hope that by doing so you may succeed in forcing the hand of the Governor and his advisers. Others, some of whom have long and loyal service to the government of Nigeria, have remained at their work, secure in the knowledge that there is a constitutional method of approach to the Governor for the redress of any grievances which may exit... I am certain that the majority of you have no desire to "let the government down", or to mar your past good records.*¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike Nigeria" (1945), see paragraphs one, three, and four.

¹⁷⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike Nigeria", see 'Notes on the Strike at Zaria', paragraph one.

¹⁷⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike Nigeria", see 'Notes on the Strike at Zaria', paragraph one.

¹⁷⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. 4028 Vol.1. In "Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945."

¹⁷⁹ Lindsay, L. "No Need... to Think of Home"? Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, c. 1940-61", in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1998, 441.

¹⁸⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. 4028 Vol. 1. In "Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945."

¹⁸¹ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Notice to Government Employees'.

Using the war as a justification to win the workers' support, Pitcairn further requested strike breakers to remain resolute in supporting the government in its efforts to continue the functioning of public utility services with the assurance of affording them the utmost backing and protection. This moment was believed to be imperative to both the colonial government and the aggrieved striking African government workers as Pitcairn further stated that:

*I ask those who have ceased work to re-consider very seriously their position, and the results which their precipitate action may have on the prosperity and well-being of the community as a whole. You should remember that the government also has difficulties, almost all a legacy of this war in which Nigeria has played so notable and loyal a part. I appeal to you to return to your work and to your service during this critical time.*¹⁸²

A similar sentiment was voiced by G. D. Pitcairn, the Acting Resident when he advised striking workers who desired to resume service, but whose circumstance at their workplace rendered their return difficult, to put forward their names to their respective European HODs.¹⁸³ Notwithstanding the numerous calls made by the government to the strikers to reconsider their stance and return to work, these calls were not responded to in some quarters especially among the railway workers in Zaria and the press staff at Kaduna among other places. This led the authorities to threaten retributive actions by citing the Defence Regulation No. 133 of 1942 which prohibited government employees from absenting themselves from duty without the consent of the HOD as a punishable offence that must be kept in force. As the warning further spelled out; 'everybody should know however, that the power to arrest government servants who strike is given by the law'.¹⁸⁴

Nevertheless, as a way of demonstrating their commitment and team spirit to the workers' struggle, two masons, Ifejioku and Julius, who were staff of the agricultural department in Samaru Zaria, continued to remain absent from duty in spite of the eviction threat that was issued to them by the agricultural officer on 25 and 26 June respectively. On 27 June an individual notice was conveyed to Ifejioku and Julius by the G. D. Pitcairn, Acting Resident which reads:

¹⁸² NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Notice to Government Employees'.

¹⁸³ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Government Notice on General Strike of Government Technical Workers'.

¹⁸⁴ The chief commissioner sent this message to make clear to the people what the strike is about and the government position in that regard. See 'Message for Broadcast', NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945).

*Under the powers conferred on the commissioner of labour by Reg. 158 of the Defence Regulations and delegated by him to me, I hereby direct that you should forthwith vacate the government Quarters at present occupied by you at Samaru... Failure to comply with this order constitutes an offence against the Defence Regulations.*¹⁸⁵

As the colonial officials intensified the use of such kind of punitive and other related measures to retract the strikers back to diverse places of work, the aggrieved executive members of the workers union at one of their usual closed-door meetings held on 1 July informed the striking workers of the new developments concerning their struggle including the purported government award of COLA which would be disbursed on 17 July.¹⁸⁶ This contradicted an earlier correspondence to the technical workers signed by the chief secretary of the government which rebutted the alleged government granting of COLA. In the words of the chief secretary; 'It is not true that the British government has sent out the money to pay COLA to the workers and it must be understood that money for payment of wages can only come out of the pockets of the Nigerian taxpayers'.¹⁸⁷ Also communicated at the gathering was the G. D. Pitcairn scheduled meeting with representatives of the workers during which he would address the striking workers on the position of the strike. To that regard, the strikers unanimously agreed not to return to work until they received a duly certified press notification from their president and secretary in Lagos.¹⁸⁸

As a response to another call made from the district traffic superintendent, the strikers at daybreak assembled in district traffic superintendent's office and a telegram from the chief traffic superintendent was presented to them stating that 'strike is over, workers to resume duty'.¹⁸⁹ The striking African workers doubted and questioned the genuineness of the message which was a replica of the tactic that transpired at the eve of the general strike. On their departure from the district traffic superintendent's office, the striking workers were quoted as saying:

¹⁸⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Order of Eviction of Masons from Quarters'.

¹⁸⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 1 July, 1945.

¹⁸⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Government Notice on General Strike of Government Technical Workers'.

¹⁸⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Intelligence Reports' by Cpl John Odiase, and Sgt Okonkwo dated 3 July, 1945.

¹⁸⁹ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 5 July, 1945.

*Ha Brethren! What does these white men thinks the Africans of these days. They thought they could just show us a blind telegram to resume duty when it is not followed by any written instructions from our heads in Lagos? Nevertheless, we are not. Why are the government worried, let them continue to use the British Non-Commissioned Officer's (BNCO) as Drivers, Foremen, etc. We are in our homes, and we alright. We shall never resume duty except Lagos Headquarter office of the workers union directs.*¹⁹⁰

It should be noted at this point that the colonial authority not only relied on the use of law enforcement agencies, official circulars and pamphlets to launch propaganda campaigns targeted at vanquishing the strike, but also infiltrated the workers' leadership as some kingpins within the top echelon of the unions were alleged to have compromised the workers' determination by conspiring with the colonial authority. These coalitions in their attempt to undermine the workers' unity instructed the striking workers to slow down the industrial action from 6 July,¹⁹¹ a claim which complemented an earlier widespread rumour postulating that most workers would recommence duties on 2 July. In line with the alleged call to restart work or jeopardize their pension rights, some staff members of Bukuru postal service in the Jos province were reported to have resumed work on Saturday, 7 July.¹⁹²

Furthermore, as a result of their role in uncovering the activities of the union's blacklegs, the Zik's press was accused of politicizing the strike by means of mounting public mobilization campaigns. On 6 July, the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* newspapers were accused of a calculated falsification of government's course of action with the clear 'intention of discrediting the workers' leaders whose authority government was at the time attempting to re-establish.'¹⁹³ This led the authority to re-enact Defence Regulation 12 which accorded the government influence over the press. As contained in Bulletin No. 16 of Monday 9 July, 1945, it was stated that; 'Under Reg. 3 of Regs. 19/1945 His Excellency the Officer Administering the government has prohibited the printing or publishing of the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* as from 6 p. m. on Sunday, July 8 1945'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Intelligence Report' by Cpl John Odiase dated 6, and by Sgt Okonkwo dated 5 July, 1945.

¹⁹¹ See NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945).

¹⁹² NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'General Strike: June-July 1945 Official Daily News Bulletin'.

¹⁹³ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. 4028 Vol. 1. In 'Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945.'

¹⁹⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945). See 'General Strike: June-July 1945 Official Daily News Bulletin'.

However, it can be argued that the embargo placed on the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* newspapers which had provided wide coverage of the industrial action was in fact aimed at defeating the strike. As it was observed subsequent to the suspension placed on these newspapers, some African government workers began to drift back to their places of work. Nonetheless, although some departments experienced improvements in service provision, others relied on skeleton services. This period was also characterized by notices that threatened to terminate striking workers' appointments and engage the services of new staff as their replacement if they failed to go back to work, or that they would be charged in court for sabotage under Regulations 133 of 1942 or Part 8 of the Defence Regulations.¹⁹⁵

While some of the striking workers responded to these threats, the government press staff at Kaduna declined to follow suit and return to work, even though its headquarter at Lagos was alleged to have succumbed to such threats. On the 12 July, the chief secretary to the government wrote to the acting secretary at the helm of the Northern provinces inquiring about the next line of action to be taken against the employees of the government press for not complying with the directive of recommencing work as had their head office in Lagos. By so doing, the colonial officials wanted to establish the illegality of the industrial action under the war-time emergency regulations and irresponsibility of the Northern provincial leaders. As was contained in a telegraph:

*Instructions to return to duty by letter from government Press Union, Lagos, handed to Kaduna Branch, who refused to comply. Validity of letter undisputed, but Kaduna Branch repudiates action by Lagos Union on grounds that it is contrary to orders of the Federation of which government Press Union is member. Is there likelihood Federation shortly taking action? It is proposed prosecute four leaders of government Press Union here unless you definitely advise such action would compromise negotiations at present proceeding.*¹⁹⁶

Taking into consideration the workers action, it is significant at this point to note that the level of response which the government media propaganda achieved varied from one department to the other. By 16 July for instance, according to the District Running Superintendent, out of the 1347 workers of the Nigerian railway services in Zaria and

¹⁹⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Secret Endorsement by the Acting Secretary, Northern Provinces, dated 17 July, 1945'.

¹⁹⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'The Acting Secretary of the Northern Province telegraph to G. D. Pitcairn, The Resident, Zaria Province, dated 16 July, 1945'.

headquarters of RWU in Northern Nigeria, 1250 persons were still on strike, 85 persons did not join the industrial action, while 12 persons had returned to work.¹⁹⁷ And among the 1084 posted to the station to serve under different provincial administrations, a total of 931 persons had joined the industrial action, 83 persons did not take part in the industrial action, while 70 persons were reported to have returned to work.¹⁹⁸

As pointed out earlier, prior to the commencement of the industrial action, government was in the process of making emergency plans and had urged the native authorities within the Northern provinces to supply labourers at the Zaria railway trading centre to perform other functions and to ease the flow of exportable goods. This prearrangement as noted above suffered a setback as the majority of the supplied labourers stayed off their duty posts due to influence from the leadership of the labour union, and only a few remained at their post. E. Ukonna who was both the president of RWU in Zaria and Northern Workers Federation (NWF) was nicknamed “Imoudu of Zaria” due to his style of leadership and the ability to coordinate the strike and the manner in which he secured the labourers’ and public support.¹⁹⁹

In the event where the government propaganda failed to yield the desired results, retributory actions were taken against the striking workers. This was the situation with employees of the Nigerian railway at Kurmin Biri following the arrival from Kafanchan of Mr Riach, the Assistant Engineer, Mr Slevin, the Permanent Way Inspector (PWI), Mr Sandison, a Zaria based Assistant Traffic Officer, Mr Gidley, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), and Mr Elliot, the Jos-based Labour Officer, who had embarked on an official tour of the provinces of Northern Nigeria to assess the level of workers’ compliance to government directives. The said officials were accompanied by a cohort of eight men from the Nigerian Police, Wanbai who was the District Head of Kachia, two Yandoka, two messengers, and over twenty followers as they arrived at Kurmin Biri.²⁰⁰ There were cases which suggested that such visits were characterized by intimidation of the strikers.

In a related incident as appended in a petition that was addressed to the Residents of the provinces of Jos and Zaria concurrently and copied to the federated railway union by the

¹⁹⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Report from DRS’s Office, Nigerian Railway, Zaria dated 16 July, 1945’.

¹⁹⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Memo from the District Running Superintendent.’

¹⁹⁹ Oyemakinde, Wale. “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945.” 703.

²⁰⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49).

associated workers' union in Kafanchan on the 25 July, it was alleged that Mr Oji who was a member of staff with the railway was maltreated by the police in collaboration with the Yandokas who forcefully ejected him from the official quarters he occupied as a result of an order from the labour officer.²⁰¹ A similar circumstance was earlier recorded on 28 June between Mr Ritchie who was the Railway Traffic Inspector (RTI) at Kafanchan and guard Anagbogu who worked a train from his home town Makurdi the night the general strike was declared. Comparable kind of treatment was also reported to have been meted on Mr Jubril Gwaje by the permanent way inspector on 6 July. According to a report, Gwaje's official apartment at Zonkwa was broken by Mr Slevin under the pretence of recovering working implements in Gwaje's custody, since he had not resumed work. As contained in the petition, complaints made by the striking workers at the police station were generally not entertained.²⁰²

On the other hand, the situation was different with those who did not take part in the industrial action or reconsidered their position and resumed duties at their diverse places of work as they were in some instances considered for salary increments and/or upgrading in their working status. This was the situation at the pumping station in Zaria with Sule who was a junior staff with the water works department. By reason of his decision to remain on duty even as others had joined the industrial action, the provincial engineer on the 11 July recommended that as a way of acknowledging his steadfastness, the man should be upgraded to grade V from the rank of a junior artisan grade IV and his annual earnings be doubled to £36 from £18 which would be paid in retrospect from 1 July.²⁰³ Considering this as a good move to lure strikers back to work, E. A. Miller who was the commissioner of labour for Nigeria in a letter addressed to all HODs on 20 July observed that:

Considerable members of technical workers refused to take part in the General Strike and continued loyally at their posts. This fact considerably assisted government in maintaining essential services in the emergency and it may be felt that some recognition should be given to them. It would be true to say that these men merely performed the duties for which they were employed, but it should not be forgotten that they continued to do it under very difficult conditions. Not only did many of them turn their hands to comparatively

²⁰¹ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49).

²⁰² NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1.(i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49).

²⁰³ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in "General Strike" (1945), see 'Zaria Provincial Engineer Memo to the Resident'.

*strange tasks, but also continued at their posts despite considerable odium, if not actual danger, from their fellows.*²⁰⁴

With this initiative from the government side, opposing opinions within the strikers emerged. Disagreement arose amongst contesting sides as some strikers were tired of living devoid of adequate financial support.²⁰⁵ An example of this was the case of B. E. E. Adam who was a grade 1 electrician with the PWD who claimed that after he had suggested at a meeting on 26 July for the striking workers to reconsider their stand and return to work for negotiations to take place, he was strongly criticized by other striking workers who maintained a different perspective. In that regard, B. E. E. Adam, in cooperation with his accomplice, on 28 July wrote to the Resident, PE, and the electrical engineer at Zaria, in what they referred to as “an independent appeal” affirming their decision and readiness to resume at their various units on Tuesday 31 July, which according to them was both for their convenience and that of the government.²⁰⁶ Their standpoint was made known in a letter which stated that:

*On behalf of those who will return to work it is requested that fair opportunity be given in the different departments of work for us to carry on with our normal duties without any trouble whatsoever. In the connection, it is necessary to inform you that my supporters and I belong to a class of workers who believe that it is more to our advantage to return to work and state our grievances for government to set up machinery for settlement. We have by this letter broken our faith with the strikers who are obdurately waiting for demands by workers to be granted before they return to work.*²⁰⁷

Having considered this as a welcome development, the government in its usual comportsment released a notice which re-emphasized its readiness to provide B. E. E. Adam and others adopting a similar stance with the utmost backing to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively and to resist any force that attempted to meddle with the state of affairs.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See E. A. Miller Secret telegraph to all HODs.

²⁰⁵ NAK: Zaria Prof./c.4/1945 in “General Strike” (1945), see ‘Intelligence Report’ by Sgt Okonkwo dated 10 July, 1945.

²⁰⁶ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See ‘B. E. E. Adam of the African Staff Quarters letter to the Resident, Zaria.’

²⁰⁷ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1(i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See ‘B. E. E. Adam ...’.

²⁰⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1(i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See ‘Police Notice on Civil Disorder, By Order of The Commissioner, The Nigerian Police.’

Negotiations Leading to End the Strike

The general atmosphere that had prevailed amidst workers and their new leaders before going to the negotiation table was that of scepticism about what would be the outcome of the government's reaction. Thus the new leadership was reluctant to enter into discussion with Mr Beresford Stooke who was the chief secretary of the government owing to the fear of being incarcerated. After summoning courage, the first union delegation which comprised Luke Emejulu, Marcus Osindero, S. A. Olukoya, and T. O. Okapareke were presented to the government by some prominent Lagosians.²⁰⁹ The demands tabled by the workers representatives in the course of their first meeting encompassed the complete granting of COLA; full payment for the strike duration; the immediate acquittal and exoneration of persons who were indicted for their roles in the workers struggle; re-engagement and no victimization of persons who had downed tools.²¹⁰

However, prior to the commencement of negotiation, representatives of the Nigerian government led by the chief secretary had already made their decisions, especially on issues relating to payments. The government delegation, having listened to demands tabled by the union leaders, responded that the decision related to workers' demands would only be reviewed once strikers returned to work. As a result, it took about three to four days of careful deliberation before both parties reached an agreement that inspired representatives of the workers union to agree to call off the industrial action in Lagos with effect from 4 August.²¹¹ With the calling off of the industrial action at midnight of 4 August in Lagos, the workers unions were allowed to choose from among their representatives those who would tour the provinces of Southern, Eastern, and Northern Nigeria at government expense to notify strikers about the union resolution to end the industrial dispute. B. A. Akindiya, C. N. Garber, J. O. Okaka, L. M. E. Emejulu, and S. A. George were assigned the responsibility of updating other provinces to stop the industrial action.²¹² This effort worked out in other provinces with the exception of Northern Nigeria where the strikers at the railway maintained that it was only when workers' requests were fully addressed that they would comply. It was only with the arrival of Michael Imoudu, supported by F. O. Coker, S. A. Olukoya, and

²⁰⁹ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. c.4/1945 "General Strike" (1945), in 'Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945.'; Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 707.

²¹⁰ NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. c.4/1945 "General Strike" (1945), in 'Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945.'

²¹¹ Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 706.

²¹² Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 707.

Marcus Osindero, in Northern Nigeria to brief workers of the decision reached that the striking workers finally resolved to resume work on the 11 August.²¹³ This was followed by the lifting of the ban on the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* newspapers on 15 August 1945 'but the Defence Regulations under which the ban was imposed are being kept'.²¹⁴

Conclusion

As the longest strike in the history of colonial Nigeria, this research has proven quite a number of points that researchers should bear in mind when carrying out further studies related to this event. The insistence of Northern workers on the need for the arrival of Michael Imoudu to confirm the decision to call off the strike before they resumed work was proven in this chapter to 'invalidate the then popular notion that once the Lagos Labour Front accepted a course of action or inaction all provincial branches automatically confirmed'.²¹⁵

Notwithstanding the point made, the refusal of workers from the railway and other departments to return to work even when their Lagos representatives agreed to do so does not imply that workers were completely at one as the different instance cited above have demonstrated. As such, taking into account these diverse cases of strike breaking and non-participation at all, the question relating to "unity" and "steadfastness" among workers needs to be carefully examined.

Further, the government contingency plans have indicated that the imperial employer was prepared for the industrial action and this eventually assisted them to maintain the provision of basic services. Being mindful of the importance of agricultural production, the imperial authority identified the urgent need to draw additional labour along transportation and communication routes to ensure the flow of groundnuts, among other products. On the other side, some of the striking workers retired back to their farms as the work stoppage commenced, which led to an improvement in the quantity of crops harvested that year.²¹⁶

Knowing fully the significance of such crops to the imperial employer, the workers during

²¹³ Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 707; NAK: Zaria Prof./3535/S.1; NAK: Zaria Prof. c.4/1945 "General Strike" (1945), in 'Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants' Technical Workers' Union, June-August 1945.'

²¹⁴ NAK: Zaria Prof./4028 Vol. 1 in, (i) General Strike Nigeria. (ii) Labour Unrest (1945-49). See 'Confidential Home Chat, No. 37, dated 15 August, 1945.'

²¹⁵ Oyemakinde, Wale. "The Nigerian General Strike of 1945." 707.

²¹⁶ Lindsay, A. Lisa. "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike." 795; NAK: 40046 - Annual Report on Sokoto Province, 1945: (By Mr G. E. McCabe, Acting Resident); NAK: 40130 - Annual Report on Zaria Province, 1945: (By G. D. Pitcairn ESQR, Acting Resident); NAK: 40123 - Annual Report on Katsina Province, 1945: (By Mr H. B. Leonard, Acting Resident); NAK: 40210 - Annual Report on Ilorin Province, 1945: (By Captain J. P. Smith, Senior Resident); NAK: 40046 - Annual Report on Sokoto Province, 1945: (By Mr G. E. McCabe, Acting Resident).

one of their meetings agreed that the groundnut-selling season would be an ideal time for subsequent industrial action.

To all intents and purposes, after examining the 1945 industrial dispute in Northern Nigeria, this chapter has argued that its significance lies in its multifarious nature rather than the orthodox story of triumphant unity. The study also argues that the significance of the strike should not only be viewed from the perspective of winning COLA or the “unbreakable unity” among workers, but its significance should be viewed through the varying roles played by different forces in shaping the course of the industrial action within the provinces of Northern Nigeria. This moment can be regarded as a period characterized by toil and tears as both the government and the African workers felt the pinch emanating from the work stoppage. Though the exact numbers of workers on strike varied as the industrial action progressed, Alkasum Abba stated the involvement of about 150,000 persons at its initial stage all over Nigeria;²¹⁷ by the middle of July the figure stood at 32,000 persons.²¹⁸



²¹⁷ Abba, A. “The Significance of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the Politics of Nigeria, 1950-1960.” 66; Lindsay, A. Lisa. “Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike.” 797; Kazah-Toure, Toure. “The Development of the Nationalist Movement in Zaria Province, 1902-1960.” 404.

²¹⁸ NAK: Zaria Prof. c.4/1945 “General Strike” (1945), in ‘Memorandum on the Strike of the African Civil Servants’ Technical Workers’ Union, June-August 1945.’

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary and General Conclusion

The period 1945 is an important chapter in the history of anti-colonial struggle because it was the first occasion that workers embarked on industrial action that lasted for a significant period of time. In spite of the important role played by workers within the provinces of Northern Nigeria, little has been written about this area or the role of these workers; instead most of the studies have primarily been written from a Lagos-centric perspective. This prompted the need to embark on this project.

In re-reading and re-writing this historical event with a special focus on the Northern provinces, I have sought to place it in a wider context. Firstly, I have located it in the context of the emergence and development of workers unions in Nigeria. Here I argued that several factors were responsible for the growth in unionization. These included importantly the specific way in which the local economy had been restructured and incorporated into the capitalist system, to the latter's benefit. This was achieved through the distribution of seeds to boost production in cash and exportable crops, the establishment of trading centres and setting up of crop-buying agents, as well as the introduction of a single trading currency. These policies encouraged the emergence and development of new towns triggered by the mass influx of people from rural to urban areas who sought to benefit from the wage earning opportunities that economic restructuring offered, leading to rapid urban expansion. With the massive influx of able-bodied men to the urban centres especially in the 1930s, the colonial administrators were confronted with issues associated with rising unemployment, exacerbated by economic hardship of the war and post-war period.

All through the war period, both the working and living conditions of the colonized people deteriorated owing to war demands. These included reported cases of foodstuffs being confiscated from the local producers to feed the armies, imposition of levies, new modes of collecting taxes all of which were compounded by a compulsory cut in the pay of African workers in support of a "Win the War" campaign. The local economy was in crisis during this period as prices of labour and local produce declined while essential commodities were in short supply and their prices increased rapidly. The African workers through their representatives called for an adjustment in the cost of living allowance but only that of

expatriate workers was modified, thereby leaving African workers to contend with economic privation. It was this wage erosion and discrimination in the face of economic crisis that provoked industrial action. In short, Northern Nigeria's incorporation and role in the economic prosperity of colonial empire, combined with the immediate political and economic context of the war, are important factors in comprehending and explaining the events that led to the Nigeria labour unrest.

A second important context for my study is a wider set of debates regarding the relationship of labour and politics. Within the union itself two lines of argument developed: one line of argument was for the integration of workers' struggles into anti-colonial politics, championing what has been described as 'political unionism'; a second line, described as politically conservative, argued for a form of 'economic unionism' in which workers' struggles should remain outside of politics. As I have shown these disagreements resulted in a split within the union along ideological lines with a strictly trade union wing on one hand, and a faction that supported party affiliation on the other hand. However, the continuous victimization of the African workers by the colonial government tended to provide the two rival factions with a common goal, while the unions' ability to harmonize such ideological differences during these challenges encouraged greater participation in union activities.

Such debates and developments within the workers' movement not only in Nigeria but elsewhere on the continent have given rise to a significant historiography around the relationship between labour, workers' struggles and the anti-colonial movement as well as the role and character of such involvement in the anti-colonial movement. Within the Nigerian historiography, one argument concerning the general strike was that the need to secure a popular base made nationalist politicians explore the rift that existed between the workers' representatives and the colonial government, to their advantage. This they did by providing material support as well as media coverage to the workers' struggles. Their support was argued to be an important factor that encouraged the union leadership to embark on an industrial action when the colonial administration failed to address the post-war hardships faced by the Nigerian workers, leading to the incorporation of the union, particularly a group regarded as the radicals, into political affairs. Scholars such as Alkasum Abba have argued that this development radically hastened the anti-colonial struggle. His contribution is part of what may be described as a 'triumphalist view', in which united workers, standing shoulder to shoulder, are seen to have been at the forefront of the anti-colonial movement.

It is this 'triumphalist view' that I have sought to challenge, arguing for a more complex and uneven set of dynamics. Here I advanced two central arguments. Firstly, the needs of the metropolitan rather than the local economy drove the colonial government to put extensive contingency plans into place, prior to the commencement of the industrial action, which had an effect on the efficacy of the strike. Secondly, this study has argued that the level of involvement among the African workers in the strike was uneven, thus questioning the popular support the strike was said to have enjoyed which is embedded in most of the literature. These two arguments contest the widely held notion that depicted the workers' action in Northern Nigeria as completely united and successful, and suggest the need for a more nuanced approach.

In conclusion, owing to the complexity involved in examining and interpreting the 1945 industrial action in Northern Nigeria, this study cautions researchers working in the nationalist tradition to avoid the easy assumption of united and uncritical worker support for nationalist politics that often characterises the triumphalist narratives of nationalist historiography. It further demonstrates the need to rethink the labour union struggle and where it should be placed in the anti-colonial and nationalist narratives. This has also proven the need for further research to be carried on labour and anti-colonial struggle in Northern Nigeria especially as it relates to the question of the longevity of the industrial action.

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