

ZIKIST MOVEMENT 1946 – 1950: A REAPPRAISAL

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Abstract

Colonial rule was a bitter pill to swallow for some people. British colonial hegemony before Second World War appeared to have no terminal date in Nigeria. The early nationalists were interested in sharing power with the British authority. And British Empire shone radiantly until Nazi Germany rocked it to its foundation. The call for independence became more strident after the Second World War. While some older nationalists wanted a gradual approach to self – rule, some heady young men demanded immediate independence from the British raj. The Zikist Movement was a collection of angry and embittered youths desirous of positive action and prepared to ignite a revolution to end British policy of divide and rule. The Zikist realized the debilitating effect of ethnicity and regionalism and wanted to nip it in the bud through a revolution. They wanted to invest Nnamdi Azikiwe as the Nigerian messiah and hoped that through acts of sabotage to incite the British authority into arresting and imprisoning Azikiwe. But the dreams of these youths and aspirations for a united Nigeria were aborted. Their hero, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was not desirous of such immortality and when the chips were down denied them. By 1950 the British authority found enough reasons to declare the movement an unlawful organization. This paper will be based on secondary source materials. It would also attempt to show how the dreams of Nigerian youths were dashed by those whom they looked upto. The denial of the Zikist by Nnamdi Azikiwe and British authority's inquisition would be examined.

Keywords: Zikist movement, British colonial administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe

Introduction

Nations under colonialism, foreign domination or occupation face a lot of challenges: racial discrimination, injustice, economic exploitation, intimidation, victimization and social segregation among others. This highhanded exercise of power often arouses indignation of the subject races. The expression of anger gives rise to nationalism which culminates in the quest for self-determination by a people desirous to throw away the oppressive rule of the colonial overlord. The British colonial administration in Nigeria was autocratic and consigned the vast majority of the people to the margins of the society. The educated elite were denied employment opportunities in the civil service and local government administration. Economic opportunities were not extended to the local population as bank loans became the exclusive preserve of the multi-national companies and their Syrian and Lebanese business associates. According to Coleman this discriminatory practices of European banks were sources of grievance and a stimulus to nationalist sentiment.¹

Early nationalist struggle in Nigeria was an attempt by the elite to participate in the colonial administration. There was no concerted effort to achieve independence. The British colonial authority

felt that the people were so backward that they needed long years of tutelage in the art of governance before they could achieve self-rule. Thus, constitutional reforms were introduced, with limited franchise and elective representation granted to few cities over a long period of time. Nigerians were expected to channel their grievances through constitutional means: petitions resolutions and delegations to the British authorities. However, the tempo of nationalist agitation became accelerated shortly after the Second World War. The ex-service men returned to the country embittered as a result of the manner they were discharged after contributing to British victory during the war without any commensurate gratuity for their sacrifices. The war had exploded the myth of whiteman's superiority as the Nigerian combatants had witnessed whitemen grieving, dying, crying and whimpering in the face of hazardous undertakings. All this added filip to nationalist ferment in Nigeria as more youths became radicalized, vocal and audacious in their opposition to continued British colonial rule in the country. With a vibrant independent press led by Nnamdi Azikiwe's group of newspapers, the youth found the media to express their views and an articulate American trained hero, Azikiwe to lead the country to independence.

Nnamdi Azikiwe's journalism, political propaganda and trenchant criticism of the British colonial authority won for him many young admirers and indeed not without justifiable hostility from the British colonial masters. Zik's Group of Newspapers gave unflinching support to nationalist cause. During the June 1945 general strike embarked upon by seventeen trade unions over higher wages and allowances due to rising cost of living, Zik's group of newspapers gave full support to the workers despite the threat from the colonial authority to ban the publications. Eventually, two of the newspapers (West African Pilot and Daily Comet) were banned for over a month by British colonial government for misrepresenting facts relating to the general strike.² Azikiwe was shaken by this brutal threat to freedom of expression which he had championed in Nigeria prior to the ban on his newspapers. He subsequently fled to Onitsha, alleging threat to life which the colonial officials vehemently denied even though nobody expected them to admit. This assassination story real or imagined, boosted Zik's nationalistic credentials and drew to him mass following across the length and breadth of Nigeria.

These young idealistic Nigerians found in Azikiwe an authentic national hero that imperialist forces were out to eliminate. They sought measures to protect their idol and advance his ideas against the common enemy: the British. According to G.O Olusanya the Zikist Movement came into existence as a result of assassination story episode with the avowed object of protecting Azikiwe from his enemies.³ This radical youth organization, the only freedom fighters during colonial period, prepared to take up arms against the British lion needs a reappraisal so as to take its proper place in our national history.

The Rise of Zikist Movement: 1946 – 1950

The end of the Second World War had emboldened nationalist leaders in all dependent and colonial territories to demand for immediate independence. During the war the Allied Powers (Britain, U. S. A., Russia and France) had endorsed the right of all peoples to self – determination and the freedom to choose the form of government under which they were to live in the famous Atlantic Charter of 1941.⁴ Nigerian nationalist, ex-servicemen, trade unionists and young school leavers re-

echoed this in diverse ways: agitation against discriminatory pay in the civil service between expatriates and Nigerians, segregation in residential areas between white officials and indigenous population and even in hospital services. Nnamdi Azikiwe through his writings spearheaded the agitation against colonial domination in Nigeria. This attracted large following among the young educated youth who saw him as a messiah to free the country from colonial rule. Zik as he was fondly called was idolized and many educated young people saw him as a role model. Many myths were woven around him: invincibility, super human, highly intuitive and cerebral. Thus, when he fled Lagos in 1945 over the assassination episode many attributed his escape to his intuition. That the British colonial officials were out to witch-hunt him for his acerbic criticism of their rule and galvanizing the educated youths against them could not be dismissed with a wave of the hand. The extent to which these young admirers of Zik were prepared to go to protect their idol from harm or denigration became obvious with the formation of Zikist Movement on February 16, 1946.

The Zikist Movement was the brain child of four young men: M.C.K . Ajuluchukwu (who became the first secretary-general), Abiodun Aloba, Kolawole Balogun (First president) and Nduka Eze. These four had lost their jobs in a Lebanese – owned newspaper, the Nigerian Advocate and suspected the British imperialists and their lackeys in Lagos for ousting them from their jobs.⁵ They were inwardly prepared to do battle against imperialist machination in Nigeria having been victims. And protecting the personification of the fight against imperialism, Zik, was paramount to them. The Zikist Movement pledged thus:

Nevermore shall we allow this evangelist (Azikiwe) to cry his voice hoarse when millions of youths of Nigeria can take up his whisper and echo it all over the world...He has lived a life that must live as long as Nigeria lives.⁶

Zik became the symbol of the struggle for independence in Nigeria and the Zikist Movement the vehicle towards its realization. Zik was deified, worshipped and idolized by these militant youths. His life was celebrated and promoted as the ideal of the Nigerian manhood. Zik became a legend and his fame was carried to all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria by the Zikists. The Zikist philosophy proclaimed that for Africa to emerge from the debris of her political degradation and stupor, the youth should embrace the five principles of spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and eventual triumph of national resurgimento.⁷ On November 16, 1946, the birthday of Dr. Azikiwe, all branches of the Zikist Movement held special mass meetings at which the Zikist flag was unfurled and the Zikist song “My Life Has Been a Joy to me” was sung to celebrate “Zik Day”.⁸ As Mkwugo Okoye had emphasized that Nnamdi Azikiwe at the time symbolized the inner most yearnings of Nigerian youths. His bold and direct journalism, especially his fiery editorials and “Inside stuff” column in the West African Pilot and other papers in the Zik Group, had destroyed whatever inferiority complex or fears that had inhibited the people from challenging the prerogatives of the colonial power and to inspire them with a new respect and pride of race which then permeated the nationalist movement.⁹

Indeed, Nnamdi Azikiwe had inspired a generation of Nigerian youths who emulating him sought and acquired American university education which the British had derided as inferior to their own. He was also credited with influencing Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and a host of other nationalists in East and West Africa. One of his young admirers, A. A. Nwafor Orizu, coined the term

Zikism from which the movement's name derived. According to Nwafor Orizu ...There is one social myth upon which Zikism should grow and spread its branches. That myth is African irredentism...the redemption of Africa from social wreckage, political servitude, and economic impotency; it must also mean extricating Africa from ideological confusion, psychological immaturity, spiritual complacency, and mental stagnation.¹⁰ Zik's followership caught across ethnic divide and the Zikist Movement was a pan-Nigerian organization that attracted the finest and noblest minds among the educated youth.

This young revolutionary movement had a distinct mode of dressing – white suit, later changed to white agbada, red muffler, a flag of five colours with a red star and newsletter Zimo.¹¹ Their mode of dressing was like a magnet that caught the imagination of the youth who rushed in to join the movement. During ceremonial occasions such as Zik Day (Zik's birthday anniversary) members adorn themselves in white agbada and red muffler. The ground was most fertile after the Second World War because of the high expectation by the people for independence that young school teachers, clerks, artisans, students, journalists and ex-service men flock to the radical youth movement. In no time branches of the Zikist movement was established in major towns throughout the country. An Anti – Colour Bar Movement founded in Kano, by Osita Agwuna and Raji Abdallah at about the same time quickly joined the Zikist Movement. During the subsequent reorganization of the movement, Raji Abdallah became the president while Agwuna became the deputy president.¹² At the early stage of the movement, it was closely allied to the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun, NCNC, as its youth wing. As Coleman aptly observed “The NCNC is the whole and the Zikist Movement is only a part of the whole”.¹³ This relation is understandable since the hero of the movement, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was at that time the national president of NCNC.

The aims and objectives of the Zikist Movement as elaborated in its official publication are summarized as follows:

- (i) To synthesize and disseminate the high ideals of African thought and practice and work for peace, justice, liberty, equality and fraternity among men and nations.
- (ii) Acceptance of national independence of African states as a prerequisite to their unity and development.
- (iii) Zikism represents the revolt of youth against the desecration and vicious influence of imperialism in Africa and against the complacency and reactionary tendencies of Old Africa in a fast-changing world.
- (iv) Zikism held the view that self-determination is an inalienable right of people and that colonialism is wholly incompatible with this right and therefore should be extirpated.
- (v) It accepts the Marxist thesis that the economic factor conditions the moral, legal, and political aspects in the development of any given society and therefore urges the need for a just distribution of national wealth.
- (vi) Zikism strives towards the establishment of “the Zikist Way of Life” and make the movement an effective organ of expression of the revolutionary youth.¹³

Imbibing these objectives the Zikists were unmindful of the persecutions and victimizations from the police, local authorities and employers. They often defied police or administrative orders not to hold public meetings or demonstrations and throw the gauntlet to any white racist whose

utterance or conduct tended to insult the dignity of Nigerians in their own country. They closed down markets or staged illegal strikes in order to celebrate national holidays or mourn great injury to national pride and tried to popularize local food, dress, history and custom in opposition to those, white and black, who tended to despise African culture.¹⁵

Although an affiliate of the NCNC, the Zikist Movement through its propaganda sought among others to inculcate the spirit of hate and contempt for the colonial regime and its institutions like the commemoration of the Empire Day – a day the Movement branded as the consummation of the enslavement of our people. The Zikists sought to expose the injustice of the unequal trade between Nigeria and Britain and of the discrimination in the salary and working conditions for white and black workers. The Zikists were in the fore-front of the mental decolonization of our people which years of brainwashing under colonial bondage had made possible. In the words of Mokwugo Okoye:

The Zikists worked hard to arouse the sleeping soul of the nation against the cruel injustices of foreign rule under which the tallest of the colonized people were made to bow to the shortest of imperialist dwarfs...¹⁶

As the influence of the NCNC began to wane by late 1948 the Zikist movement became more assertive and called for a revolution in the country to avert the ultimate triumph of imperialism and their local stooges.

The Call for Revolution

The Zikists enthusiasm for self-government was dampened by the unending feud between the NCNC and the rump of Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), in the late 1948. These two opposing nationalist groups were fanning the embers of ethnicity, regionalism and divisiveness at a time the Zikist Movement advocated for a national front to drive the British colonialist out of the country. It became imperative for the leadership of the movement to act fast in order to retain the initiative and sustain the momentum for the nationalist struggle. This was the background to the lecture delivered by Osita Agwuna, Deputy President of the Movement in 1948 entitled "A call for Revolution". As Prof. Ikenna Nzimiro, an ex-Zikist aptly surmised:

The call for Revolution delivered by the Deputy President, Osita Agwuna now Igwe Osita Agwuna III, was to expose the nihilistic ideology of tribal jingoism that floated between Nnamdi Azikiwe on one side and the leaders of the moribund Nigerian Youth Movement on the other. They used their national press to derail the upsurge of the revolution that was growing and divert it to tribal warfare. They wanted the innocent Igbo and Yoruba common people to go into communal war to assuage the political appetite of this nihilist cum tribalist. Again, the lecture raised storms and exposed the chicken – heartedness of this nihilist. The Zikist Movement now with organizational structure put in place by our General Secretary, was able to come out of the tussle stronger.¹⁷

The Central Committee of the Zikist Movement had resolved that a revolutionary political drive was necessary to stem the rising tide of tribalism and revitalize the NCNC fortunes that was on the wane. The Zikists' hierarchy had hatched a plan that would lead to political turmoil in the country,

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which they hoped would result in the imprisonment of Azikiwe by the British overlord. They also imagined that there would be a national uprising against the jailing of Azikiwe that would result into a positive revolutionary rising by the masses. Thus, the prisons would overflow with political prisoners thereby forcing the colonial authorities to grant a more democratic self-governing status to the country.⁸ The Deputy President of the Zikist Movement, Osita Agwuna, in his October 27, 1948 public lecture at Tom Jones Memorial Hall, Lagos, entitled "A call for Revolution" stirred the hornet's nest. He advocated a new philosophy besides Zikism to the effect that: "Those who shall be its adherents will see nothing good in cooperating with the British Government as long as we remain enslaved."¹⁹ He articulated further positive action that would bring down the British colonial government through: boycott of all things foreign, including schools and employment into the police and army; exhorting the nation to pay their taxes to the NCNC as the new People's Provisional Government; and accused the British colonial government of instigating the new outburst of inter-tribal conflict in order to prolong its rule in the country; and called for a country wide general strike and demanded that all students going overseas take a course in military science.²⁰ The Zikists had hoped to make the country ungovernable in the event of Azikiwe's anticipated arrest by the colonial government. The Zikist Movement believed that thousands of people in the country looked up to Zik as the Joshua of Nigeria and hoped that he might become the Nehru of Nigeria.

Unfortunately for the Zikists the British colonial overlord did not take any irrational action against Zik. Most probably the British had learnt their lessons in India and did not want to make a martyr of Azikiwe. The expected mass revolution in Nigeria did not materialize. Rather Osita Agwuna and the chairman of the public lecture Anthony Enahoro, a non – Zikist were arrested on charges of sedition. Two other members of the movement – Ralph Aniedobe and Ogoegbunam Duke Dafe were also charged in connection with the public lecture. The NCNC cabinet resolved to stand by the Zikist Movement during the crisis and gave its approval for a mass, meeting on November 7, 1948. Azikiwe who was expected to preside over the meeting stayed away pleading tiredness after leading a party mission to Ijebu Ode. Oged Macaulay chaired the occasion recalling that Britain had overthrown the Roman yoke and saw no reason why Nigeria should not do same to the British imperial yoke. The president of the Zikist movement Raji Abdallah at the occasion made the now famous passionate speech in which he averred that:

I hate the Union Jack with all my heart because it divides the people wherever it goes...It is a symbol of persecution, of domination, a symbol of exploitation, of brutality. We have passed the age of petition; the age of resolution, the age of diplomacy ... This is the age of action plain blunt and positive action.²¹

The government did not take kindly to this defiant speech with revolutionary undertones. Ten leaders of the Zikist Movement were arrested and charged with sedition. Raji Abdallah was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour on February 2, 1949 while the rest were jailed for various terms ranging from one year to six months.²² The colonial government clampdown on the Zikists necessitating a reorganization of the central executive committee. Nduka Eze became the president while Mokwugo Okoye was appointed secretary – general of the movement with a mandated to work out a programme to intensify positive action against British colonial administration in Nigeria.

While the Zikists were trying to strategize on ways to counter the colonial government's onslaught against the body their "chosen messiah" Azikiwe cowardly stabbed them on the back at the moment they needed to lean on his broad shoulders for survival. Azikiwe writing in his *West African Pilot* dismissed the Zikists as "fissiparous lieutenants and cantankerous followers." He denied any knowledge or consent in the Zikist programme of positive action and derided, them as only one of some 200 member – unions of the NCNC of which he was president.²³ The attempt by Azikiwe to distance himself from those idealistic youths who had elected to sink or swim with his political fortunes was uncalled for. The hallmark of a good leader is the ability to withstand pressure, to take a principled stand on an issue and bear the unpalatable consequences stoically and be able to differentiate between illusory gain and an enduring legacy. Azikiwe burnt his political estate by that singular decision to deny the Zikist and worm his way into the good books of British imperialists. Thereafter his political fortunes plummeted and Nigerian quest for immediate independence was aborted and postponed for a long time. Many Zikists drifted away from politics due to lack of conviction and treachery shown by Azikiwe's volte – face. As the retired Supreme Court Judge, Justice P. K. Nwokedi, an ex-Zikist, rightly observed about the mood of many of them: "I had gone socialist, after the betrayal of the Zikist movement by the idol of the movement, in early fifties of this century."²⁴ It may not be entirely fair to surmise that the seed of lack of credibility and conviction among Nigerian politicians was planted by Azikiwe's betrayal of the Zikists. However, his name may have dignified a cancerous growth in Nigeria's body politics as politicians are now synonymous with betrayal, double talk, deceit and treachery.

The 1949 Enugu Iva Valley Shooting and Resurgence of Zikist Movement

The incarceration of the leadership of the Zikist Movement between 1948 and 1949 did not adversely affect the movement. Being a revolutionary organization, the Zikists had anticipated such a clamp down and made arrangements to neutralize any negative disruption in the running of the association. The Zikists being active in trade unions, student unions, NCNC, ex-servicemen, traders and cultural associations were imbued with revolutionary ideas. They had inspired a new interest in African culture which was symbolized in slogans like "Back to the land", "Boycott the boycottables", and "Africa for the Africans," and had by 1948 even instituted a national church in opposition to the colonialist mission.²⁵ Thus the colonial inquisition against the movement was not as devastating and far reaching as was anticipated.

The Enugu Iva Valley colliery shooting of November 18, 1949 ignited once more the fighting spirit in the Zikist Movement. A British police officer had ordered the firing of live ammunition against unarmed mine workers agitating for a wage increase from three shillings to five shillings and ten pence, killing 21 and wounding 51 others. Many people at that time felt that the shooting was premeditated to teach the recalcitrant Igbo workers a lesson.²⁶ All branches of the Zikist Movement were mobilized for revolutionary action against the imperialist regime. Within a week serious riots involving three deaths erupted in major cities in Eastern Region particularly Enugu, Aba, Onitsha and Port Harcourt. At the same time three prominent supporters of NCNC, Mbonu Ojike, K. O. Mbadiwe and Mokuwugo Okoye (general secretary of the Zikist Movement) met with Dr. Akinola Maja, H. O. Davies of the Nigerian Youth Movement, NYM, to explore the possibility of forming a united front

and a national political party. The result was the proclamation of the National Emergency Committee, NEC, with Dr. Akinola Maja (NYM) as chairman and Mbonu Ojike (NCNC) as secretary with the aim of organizing a legal defence, to represent Enugu mine workers at the Fitzgerald Commission.²⁷

The Zikist Movement unmindful of British police agents' clandestine activities against the movement held its annual conference in Kaduna between 26 – 27 December, 1949. The conference resolved among other things to pass a vote of no confidence on the British colonial government which had become destructive to the ends for which governments of people were instituted. The Zikists also called for a new "people's government" to come into force by April 1, 1950. The annual conference gave as preconditions for settlement with Britain the following reasons: (a) recognition of Nigeria's right to self-determination; (b) payment of indemnity for past wrongs; (c) revocation of certain obnoxious ordinances and convocation of a constituent. Assembly (d) a national commission for the review of existing labour conditions in the country. The movement called for the release of all political prisoners and decided to launch a new civil disobedience campaign in the new year with a public lecture entitled: The Call for Revolution.²⁸ Copies of the "Call for Revolution" were circulated throughout the country. Unfortunately the resolve of the Zikists to confront the British colonial authority were nipped in the bud early in the new year.

On February 8, 1950, the colonial police raided all the offices of the Zikist Movement throughout the country, confiscating several documents, arrested the secretary general, Mokwugo Okoye and many branch officers. However, the movement had envisaged such police action and had made contingency plans to keep the movement afloat. All national officers had been mandated to nominate a successor in the event of arrest and were also instructed not to plead before the colonial courts but to use such trial to expose British imperialism. About 36 officers of the movement were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from three (3) to nine (9) months. The secretary general of the Zikist movement, Mokwugo Okoye, got the highest jail term of 33 months as he refused to plead before the court. In his words:

I do not as a Zikist recognize the right of this court to try this case ... you are a symbol of that imperialist machine which I and my colleagues abhor; therefore I am not pleading before this court.²⁹

On February 18, 1950, a Zikist sympathizer, Chukwuma Ugokwe, Posts and Telegraphs Department worker, attempted to assassinate the Chief Secretary to the Government, Sir Hugh Foot. He was arrested and subsequently sentenced to 12 years imprisonment with hard labour. In April 1950 the government declared the Zikist Movement an unlawful organization with purposes and methods dangerous to the government of Nigeria.³⁰ Thus the finest collection of Nigerian nationalists were hounded, demonized and branded as an illegal movement by the imperialist British regime. The Zikists were the most detribalized, idealistic, patriotic, cultural irredentist, visionary and freedom fighters par excellence. Its demise meant the derailment of the dreams of Nigerian nation and the enthronement of tribalism, sectionalism, corruption, indiscipline and dictatorship. As K. O. Mbadiwe has aptly surmised:

it is debatable to what course events would have taken if the NCNC had declared full support for the Zikist programme of Action. Perhaps, independence would have come earlier than 1960. Perhaps, the Action Group

would not have been born. Perhaps, there would not have been the NPC (Northern People's Congress), and the spokesmen of the Northern Nigeria would have been Aminu Kano, Raji Abdallah, Saad Zungur and Zana Bukar Dipcharima. Perhaps, too, there would have been shedding of innocent blood...³¹

But unlike the Zikist Movement's championing of a national cause without any ethnic colouration, the current variants of social movements are a caricature of this Pan-Nigerian movement. Whether it is due to the failure of the Zikist Movement or the triumph of the reactionary forces, modern day social movements in Nigeria tend to magnify our ethnic particularism, religious differences and strengthen our primordial social divisions. Ethnic warlords have emerged with their drums of war. The early nationalists aspiration to evolve a nation out of these multitude of nations is either in retreat or has been abandoned. A people of the same racial stock now turn their swords on each other in blind fury of promoting ethnic or religious irredentism. If these vanguards of our nationalist struggle, the Zikist Movement, were to resurrect and behold their modern day caricatures like the Odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign Statae of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) among other agents of underdevelopment and instability, they would certainly relapse into coma. The Zikist Movement strove for a Pan-Nigerianism but the imperialistic forces and their black lackeys stifled their noble intentions. Let us recreate this dream and not support agents of divisiveness, backwardness and instability.

Conclusion

The Zikist Movement was the revolutionary arm of the Nigerian nationalists. It was betrayed by the very hero they were prepared to sacrifice their lives to elevate to a living legend. Nnamdi Azikiwe's denial of the young idealist truncated what would have resulted into armed struggle against the British overlord. However, his anticipated recompense from the British imperialist did not materialize after all. The British, adept at statescraft could not entrust power to such a ruthless schemer, prepared to sacrifice his followers on the altar of transient power. They rather stoked the flame of disloyalty against Zik and gradually his followership that transcended all ethnic and religious divide in Nigeria shrank so low that Zik with a pan – Nigerian appeal became tainted with ethnic brush.

Dr Azikiwe lost an opportunity of immortality. Had he stood solidly behind the Zikist and gone to prison, he would have won renown, fame, adoration and veneration throughout Nigeria. He chose the "broad road" that led to his political emasculation. His political path remained littered with dissension and betrayal thereafter. The infamous cross carpeting of 1951 that denied him the premiership of Western Region was pay back time. His brinksmanship that resulted in the ouster of Eyo Ita as premier in Eastern Region bore the mark of treachery and political suicide. The Eastern minorities are justified to recoil from teaming up with the Igbo politically because of Azikiwe's inordinate ambition ever since then.

Nigerians are wont to proclaim that they achieved independence on a gold platter. This is farther from the truth. The Zikists made enormous sacrifices for the liberation of Nigeria. It is long over due to acknowledge this. Over thirty –six members of the Zikist Movement served various

terms of imprisonment for the cause of Nigerian independence. Yet, officialdom seemed to dismiss this as inconsequential. These labours of our true heroes are overdue for recognition. Nigerian nationalist struggle should not be equated to the activities of the Azikiwes, Awolowos and Ahmadu Bellos. It is the totality of the genuine efforts of every Nigerian towards the liberation and independence of the country. No group had better claim to this than the Zikist Movement.

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