

Review

The ripple effects of electoral experience in a frontier community in Nigeria: A study of a micro revolution in Ilorin, 1955-1959

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The adoption of Arthur Richards Constitution in 1946 and its implementation from the 1st January, 1947 translated to different things in different parts of the present day parts of Nigerian. Being an imperial order that extended the electoral principle in Nigeria, beyond Lagos and Calabar that have been having elected representatives in the European dominated councils in their respective areas since 1922, it was bound to stimulate major changes in both the administrative structures and social relations in the new areas to be covered. In Ilorin Community for instance, the operation became a platform to vent the congested minds of the oppressed peoples through the combined traditional and colonial administrative policies in the area. Ilorin, like the other parts of the then Northern Nigeria, the electoral process began as an extension of powers of the Traditional Authorities that served the indirect rule policy of the colonial administration. By 1955 however, the combination of the traditional and colonial policies had become a heavy burden that the multicultural population in Ilorin were no longer ready to bear. The situation influenced the unity of the oppressed people to form the association, which in local parlance, referred to as "Ilorin Talaka Parapo". The ripple effects of the electoral process translated into a micro revolution.

Key words: Electoral principle, ripple effects, micro revolution, colonial administration.

INTRODUCTION

The period, 1955 to 1959 in Ilorin can simply be described as a revolutionary one in the history of the community. Both the administrative and structural changes witnessed within this period were so dramatic that Ilorin became the experimental ground for major changes that were introduced in the entire Northern Region.

Indeed, many factors were directly instrumental to that development and to the dramatic changes. The location of Ilorin, as the midway between the peoples of Northern

Nigeria and those of the Southwest, and its middleman role in the historical trade relations between these peoples are also important to illustrate the impact of long relations between the peoples. The multicultural setting of Ilorin community itself placed the community at an advantage to play multiple roles in the lives of the two major linguistic groups in Nigeria. While Ilorin community shared both historical and linguistic The period, 1955 to 1959 in Ilorin can simply be described as a revolutionary

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Indeed, many factors were directly instrumental to that development and to the dramatic changes. The location of Ilorin, as the midway between the peoples of Northern Nigeria and those of the Southwest, and its middleman role in the historical trade relations between these peoples are also important to illustrate the impact of long relations between the peoples. The multicultural setting of Ilorin community itself placed the community at an advantage to play multiple roles in the lives of the two major linguistic groups in Nigeria. While Ilorin community shared both historical and linguistic relations with the southwest, the religious belief (Islam) of the majority of its population and other cultural values are similar to those of Northern Nigerian peoples. Therefore, the increasing trend of nationalist activities in the southwestern Nigeria could not but infect Ilorin and subsequently transmitted to the other parts of Northern Region. The nationalist activities in the Southwest directly influenced the people of Ilorin who were under the heavy burden of colonial policies implemented through the indirect rule system (Baba, 1986). Consequently, the people reacted by mounting pressure for reforms on the process of selecting their representatives, both to the council of the Native Authority and Regional House of Assembly.

Despite the fact that the peoples' agitation for changes in the existing processes of representation were directed against colonial government's policies, the indigenous political institution and the agencies that came with colonial administration, the colonial government did not refuse the peoples' demand. The colonial government's program at the time was to gradually disengage from the colonized areas. As previously discussed, the modification of the electoral process to accommodate the common people of Ilorin, encouraged the people to exert more pressure for further reforms. For instance, between 1950 and 1955 a number of electoral changes, which ranged from improved Electoral College system to increased number of elected representatives, were adopted for Ilorin, while electoral reforms were gradual in the other parts of the Northern Region.

These electoral changes reduced the pervasive influence of the indigenous political institutions which had evolved the scheme of ensuring that its nominees occupied positions of peoples' representatives, at the level of the council of the Native Authority and at the Regional level. This was possible because the Colonial administration originally left the process of selecting peoples' representatives to the indigenous political institutions, which it also used for its indirect rule system. On the part of the common people of Ilorin, the electoral reforms introduced as a result of their agitations, encouraged frequent meetings of the people and these

were later transformed to an Association known as "Ilorin Talaka Parapo" (Ilorin Commoners' Union) (Saidu, 1986).

Consolidation of the Revolutionary Group

By 1955, the Ilorin Talaka Parapo which began purely as a reactionary group to the heavy burden of oppression by the ruling class, was gradually transformed to a formidable group that did not only serve as opposition to the indigenous ruling class, their allies and representatives in the council of the Native Authority and Regional House of Assembly but had also become a reformist group (Saidu, 1986). It thus opened a new channel of intergroup relations amongst the people of Ilorin. Its membership cuts across the linguistic groups that constitute the population of the Emirate. Its criterion for membership was to belong to the poor class of the society, or be interested and committed to the cause of liberating the oppressed group of Ilorin community (Saidu, 1986). Prominent among members of the Talaka Parapo were Alhaji Olokooba Alanamu, Mallam Aliyu Bako and Mr. R. A. Akande whose ethnic origin cut across different groups in Ilorin. The popularity of the Association soon attracted other members of the wealthy class such as Alhaji Maito and elite such as Alhaji Ibrahim Laaro. The association benefited from the experiences and wealth of these individuals. As an opposition, the Ilorin Talaka Parapo became the watchdog of the oppressed over council of the Native Authority and conduct of Ilorin representatives in the Regional House of Assembly.

The Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ITP) demonstrated its commitment to protecting the welfare of the masses in 1956. In that year, the council of Ilorin Native Authority completed its water project and decided to fix a fee to be paid by the people to enjoy pipe borne water; Ilorin Talaka Parapo led the resistance against the payment. The association believed that such public utility was a social service, which should not require any payments from the poor people (Saidu, 1986). Consequently, it mobilized its members, both within and outside Ilorin Township, against the payment of water rate. At the association's meeting of February, 1956 members formally resolved not to pay the water rate to the Native Authority (Salau, 1987). As part of this struggle, the ITP decided to send representatives to the headquarters of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) at Kaduna, to report the incident of high handedness of the local administration. The representatives were to seek in addition a number of reforms in the operation of the ruling party (NPC) in Ilorin province, to accommodate the interest of the common people (Salau, 1987). The delegation led by Alhaji Suleiman Maito, the Chairman of the Union, had among other members, Alhaji Ibrahim Laaro, who later became the elected member to the Northern House of Assembly, to replace Alhaji Saadu

Alanamu (Salau, 1987).

On getting to Kaduna, the delegation of Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ITP) which arrived the Regional Headquarters of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) with high hopes and expected warm reception, were merely received by an administrative secretary, Malam Zakar. They were advised to return to Ilorin, and channel their complaints through the provincial branch of the party.

The unaccommodating manner in which the delegation of the Ilorin Talaka Parapo was received was not only disappointing to the delegation but was also considered hopeless because the association was directed to channel its complaints through the local executive of the NPC the same organ, it was complaining about. The situation indicated that the NPC Headquarters did not reckon with them as a group.

On the delegates return to Ilorin, another general meeting was held to report their encounter at Kaduna. The members were highly disappointed by the reported action of the officer at the Headquarters of the NPC. However rather than been totally discouraged, members of Ilorin Talaka Parapo resolved to continue with the struggle to emancipate the people of Ilorin from the yolk of oppression. Consequently, another delegation was raised to seek an alliance with the Action Group (AG), which was the ruling party in the Western Region (Salau, 1987).

As it was discussed earlier, the geographical location of Ilorin Community placed it at a dual advantage to relate with both the North and the Western regions. The decision of Ilorin Talaka Parapo to ally with the Action Group (AG), which was the ruling political party in the southwest, was to be able to sustain the struggle against the oppressors of the common people of Ilorin. On the part of the leadership of the Action Group (AG), the support towards the liberation of the downtrodden people of Ilorin was seen as an opportunity to bring all the Yoruba speaking peoples into one fold. This was in line with the party's original name of Egbe – Oduduwa. The party began as Egbe Omo Oduduwa in London (Babatunde, 1985). The indigenous ruling class in Ilorin was indeed not naïve to the new development as they rightly saw the activities of the Ilorin Talaka Parapo as directed towards their authority and privileges. Therefore, the *Emir*, the *Balogun* and the other Chiefs were united in organizing counter moves to confront the Talaka Parapo and its AG allies.

The coming together of the indigenous political elite in Ilorin, this time was under a totally different atmosphere. They jointly saw the working relations between the Ilorin Talaka Parapo and Action Group as a renewal of the threat to their respective and collective survival. This explains their collective commitment to frustrate the programs of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* and the Action Group. The indigenous ruling class embarked on the mobilization of people by emphasizing on the hostile historical relations between the *Emirate* and the Yoruba.

The issue of the pollution of Islamic religion in Ilorin as a result of the actions of ITP was also employed to mobilize support for their own cause (Abdulfatai Bello 1987).

The impact of political alliance ITP and AG

A casual appraisal of the alliance between the revolutionary group in Ilorin, the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP) and the ruling political party in the Western Region, the Action Group (AG) cannot give the full impact of this development. The immediate situation, which brought about the struggle for freedom from the yolk of oppression, by the ITP gives the impression that the relationship was a normal and natural thing, dictated by the trend of political developments in Nigeria. However, a critical evaluation of the historical relations between the people of Ilorin and those of the kingdoms and chiefdoms that constituted the Western Region would indicate deep-rooted suspicion between the peoples.

Ilorin, having been part of the Old Oyo empire, before it was proclaimed an Emirate by the Fulani, who were generally regarded as aliens to the environment, was often hoped would be reclaimed by the Yoruba. The protracted wars of struggle for survival between Ilorin and the authority of the old Oyo Empire and later with various parts of Yoruba land, created the deep rooted rivalry and suspicions between the people of Ilorin and those of the areas that constituted the Western Region. The role of Ilorin in the fall of Old Oyo empire, its involvement in the 19th century wars in Yoruba land and its protracted rivalry with Ibadan, which was eventually settled by the colonial administration, kept the flame of distrust between the two groups alive until the advent of colonial rule. The alliance between the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP) and the Action Group (AG) of the Western Region unconsciously reopened the unfriendly relations between the indigenous ruling institutions in Ilorin and the Yoruba in general.

The *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP) alliance with the Action Group (AG) of the South West must have underestimated the impact of that historical relation between the peoples of Ilorin and the peoples of the South West. Members of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* must have seen its alliance with Action Group purely from its immediate objectives, to emancipate the common people of Ilorin from heavy burden of the indigenous rulers.

Even though, membership of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* transcended linguistic affinity and historical origin of the diverse peoples of Ilorin, the dominance of the Yoruba in the total population of Ilorin also accounted for the dominance of the Yoruba in the membership of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*. For instance, majority of the members of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP) hailed from the Alanamu and Ajikobi quarters in Ilorin, a dominant settlement of the Yoruba people. Perhaps, the dominance of the Yoruba in the membership of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP) had encouraged the AG to give full support to the alliance

with the group.

The AG gave human and material support to the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* in its struggle for peoples' emancipation through electoral process. The ITP contested against candidates sponsored or supported by the indigenous ruling oligarchy. This provided unique opportunities for the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* to popularize its programs. This was at a time that the NPC was seen as a popular party in the Northern Region but was regarded as the symbol of oppression, deprivation and injustice by the ITP in Ilorin. The campaigns of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* both within and outside Ilorin Township involved the amplification of the ills of NPC. The campaigns were so effective that the conservative nature of members of the NPC was painted as elements of oppression. The desire for change of the political situation in Ilorin, in which liberty, equality and justice would be guaranteed, was very strong.

Both the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP)/Action Group (AG) alliance and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) saw the 1956/57 election into the councils of Ilorin Native Authority and the Regional House of Assembly, as the battle of survival. The *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP)/Action Group (AG) alliance concentrated its campaign on issues relating to the then contemporary administrative experiences of the people, which were characterized by heavy burden of oppressive policies and the high handedness of the local authority on the common peoples. The need for the people's solidarity and commitment to vote for the ITP/AG alliance was stressed. The NPC on the other hand based their own campaign on historical relations between the people of Ilorin and the Southwest (Abdulfatai, 1987). The local branch of the party, which was mainly represented by the Traditional Authorities in Ilorin and the elite group that dominated the Native Authority, concentrated its campaign on the primordial issues, sentiments and the consequence of the ITP/AG alliance on the population of Ilorin (Abdulfatai, 1987). The unfriendly historical relations between Ilorin and the people of the southwest were also amplified (Abdulfatai Bello 1987).

Despite the heavy presence of the Northern Regional Government, the Traditional Authorities and the agents of oppression in the Native Authority, the common people of Ilorin were resolute to use the electoral power to secure victory for the candidates of the ITP/AG alliance. The alliance scored fifty three per cent (53%) in June, 1956 election and four (4) out of six (6) seats for Ilorin in April / May election of 1957 (Parden, 1986). Indeed, the victory of most of the candidates sponsored by ITP/AG alliance over the candidates of the NPC clearly illustrated the supremacy of the people's will over the agents of oppression. Prominent among the contestants who lost at the polls were Alhaji Saadu Alanamu, who was then the Administrative Secretary of Ilorin Native Authority. He lost to Alhaji Ibrahim Laaro, who was from Baboko area of Ilorin (Kawu, 1983). Alhaji Sulu Karnani Gambari, who

was then a Court Registrar, before he became the *Emir* in 1959 also lost to one Mr. Ajayi from Lanwa District of Ilorin. Another prominent personality that was victorious at the election was Mallam Sulyman Maito, the Chairman of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP).

The victory of majority of the candidates sponsored by ITP/AG alliance in the 1956/57 clearly illustrated the people's resentment against the autocratic rule. The losses at the polls by candidates who were members of the family of the Traditional ruling institutions, such as the *Emir*, *Balogun* and other chiefs illustrate that the pattern of voting was dictated by issues rather than linguistic or cultural differences of the people. This situation once again, demonstrated the integration of the culturally diverse population of Ilorin, to pursue common course of freedom for the common people.

The new socio-political order in Ilorin, 1957/58

The victory of members of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*/Action Group Alliance in the 1956/57 polls led to different reactions. For the oppressed people of Ilorin, it was time to celebrate their freedom and map out strategies to prevent the repeat of their bad experiences. On the other hand, the ruling oligarchy and the elites in alliance with them saw it as the time for re-strategizing because they clearly foresaw dangers ahead of them if the revolutionary group was allowed to survive. Indeed, the respective reactions from the two groups resulted into a new phase of relations. Both sides were really prepared and were at their best to undermine one another. The victory was a powerful impetus for the ITP/AG alliance because it gave a clear signal to the anticipated changes of the social, political and economic structures in Ilorin Emirate. On the other hand, the indigenous ruling class, the elite that had been part of the Native Authority, the Northern Regional government and the NPC as a party saw the defeat at the 1956/57 polls as a big challenge to their collective survival. Therefore the Regional government came to the rescue of those who lost at the elections. This was done by appointing some of those who lost at the elections into the Regional office. Added to this, the Regional government collaborated with the remnant of the NA staff still loyal to the NPC to suffocate the ITP/AG led council of Ilorin Native Authority.

The Ilorin Native Authority staff that transferred their service to the Regional administration for the fear of being victimized by the new elected council of the Ilorin Native Authority continued to serve as the link between the NPC and those still under the employment of the Native Authority. However, the Regional administration seized the opportunity on the council's attempt to discipline disobedient staff to interfere in the matters. Native Authority tried to discipline the disobedient staff.

On assumption of office, the council of Ilorin Native Authority under the *Talaka Parapo*/Action Group alliance

approached the issues relating to the commoners' interest with the required dispatch. The water rate, which was the immediate or the last factor that set ITP/AG alliance in direct commotion with the NPC was the first to be abrogated. Similar policies that placed burden on the common people were either modified or completely removed. For instance, taxes on farm produce were removed. The forest guards, which the common people considered to be oppressive, were all modified in such a way that the people were relieved.

The traditional practices and institutions of oppression such as the *Onise Oba* (King's messenger) *Oloja* (Head of the Market) and *Baba Kekere* (the small father) who served as intermediary between the people and the judges of the Sharia Courts under the Alikali were outlawed and penalty fixed for anyone caught still playing such. These were done according to the original desire of the group, for the common people of Ilorin to live a better life of freedom. Other elements of oppression such as *Aroja* were also abrogated. The fact that these outlawed local agents of oppression represented either the *Emir* or the respective *Balogun*, they considered that their interests were directly challenged. This situation however explains their commitment to the scheme to terminate the new Native Authority council, dominated by candidates of ITP/AG Alliance.

With these reforms by the (council) under the alliance of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* and Action Group, majority of the Native Authority staff, who were related to the indigenous political institutions were no longer feeling comfortable. The fears of the staff were that they would be the next targets of ITP/AG controlled council (Kawu, 1983).

Since the new leadership in the council could not dispense with all staff on the basis of being related with the indigenous political class, the council continued to accommodate some of them but it had to operate with caution and openness to avoid being misrepresented or sabotaged. On the part of the staff of the Native Authority, they were consciously on the watch for any form of humiliation of any of their respective mentors, who lost out in the elections against members of the new council (Kawu, 1983). The suspicious relations between the staff and the new council soon crystallized into open hostility. By August 1957 when the new council was barely three months old, the staff of Ilorin Native Authority petitioned the Regional Minister of Local Government, that their "... very instruments of living and liberties are being murdered" (NAK/ILO/PROF/445/5.5. Vol.I). The minister was therefore urged to deliver them from the horrors of the new council in the Ilorin Native Authority (NAK/ILO/PROF/445/5.5. Vol.I).

Given the understanding of the council, of the chain-of relations between the staff of the Native Authority, the indigenous political leaders and the regional government, the council formulated the policy that public servants should be totally insulated from partisan politics. This actually generated sharp reactions from both the Native

Authority staff and the indigenous political class. They both saw the new policy as another scheme of the new council to undermine their respective interests. Consequently both the Authority staff and their indigenous mentors decided to send a powerful delegation to the Regional government, on the implication of the new council's policy on staff participation in politics. Therefore, when the council recommendations on staff participation in politics reached the Regional government, it was not responded to. The Council eventually became impatient of the non-action or response of the Regional government on the matter and it therefore decided to operate the policy on its own (Kawu, 1983). This situation led to the suspension of the recalcitrant council staff and subsequent termination of appointment of some of them (Kawu, 1983). Judging by the way the council handled the situation relating to the recalcitrant staff, it had actually opened the channel of complicating relations between it, the staff and their mentors at the local level, on one hand and the Regional government on the other hand.

As should be expected, the action of the new council seriously affected the morale of a good number of staff of the Ilorin Native Authority. They no longer felt secured on their jobs because they were never too sure of what they could do to enjoy the confidence of their new employer (NAK/ILO/PROF/445/5.5. Vol.I.). However a few of the staff, fully backed by their traditional mentors, were ready to slog it out with the new council. They anticipated that unless something was done to save some of their mentors, who were traditional, titleholders in Ilorin could also be removed from office and their collective safety was in danger (Kawu, 1983).

It was under this climate of uncertainty that the category of staff of Ilorin Native Authority, who were members of the families of holders of traditional titles, decided to mobilize them-selves to challenge the NA elected council. The Ilorin Native Authority staff proclaimed itself a Workers Union (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.). Expectedly, the council totally refused to recognize the proclaimed Workers' Union. The council went further to formally ban the involvement of its employees in partisan politics (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol). It spelt out the punishment for any of its employees found not doing the job for which he was employed (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol. I). It was in response to the council decisions that the workers decided to send another petitions, to both the Regional government in Kaduna and the National government in Lagos on the insecurity of their jobs and even their lives under the council in Ilorin Native Authority (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol. I).

The swiftness with which the National Government in Lagos responded to the petition sent by the workers actually indicated a form of connection between the N. A. Workers or its agents with the colonial government. A

Labour Officer was dispatched to Ilorin (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol. I). Both oral and written evidences were obtained from the two sides reported to be in dispute, that is, the council and its workers.

The findings of the Labour Officer revealed that the Workers Union in Ilorin Native Authority was neither registered as such with the Regional government nor the National government (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol. I). Further analysis of the situation at Ilorin at the time made the Labour Officer to classify the relations between the Ilorin NA council and its staff as political rather than having anything to do with Labour (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.).

Mallam A. K. Oba, who the Ilorin Native Authority Council recognized as the Worker's ring leader and said to have abandoned his employment in the Native Authority for Union's activities, was strongly advised by the Labour officer to take his job more seriously (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.). Even though the workers proclaimed in their presentation to the Labour Officer that he was their President and a dedicated worker of the Authority, there was no evidence to show to the Labour Officer, that he was actually dedicated to his duties. Also the evidence to show that the Labour union was actually registered and had the legal right to operate could also not be presented to the Labour office. Hence the union was considered non-existent.

On presentation of the Labour Officer's report to the National government, it was concluded that the reported case by the staff of Ilorin Native Authority against the council could not be treated within the Labour laws. The petition received from the staff of Ilorin Native Authority was therefore considered as a manifestation of unfriendly relations between the council and its staff. The Labour officer therefore cautioned that council staff should not be encouraged to take the challenging posture to their employer.

Despite the Labour Officer's unfavourable report on the worker's report against the Council, and the confirmation that the group of workers cannot be taken for a Labour Union, the group of workers were not discouraged to go ahead with its struggle against the Council. It went ahead to still refer to itself as a Workers Union and even engaged a Legal Practitioner, Chief Richard Akinjide, to write another petition on its behalf, to the Regional government on what was summed up as mal-administration in Ilorin Native Authority (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.). In their entreaty, the Workers' Union pleaded with the Northern Regional government to appoint an impartial commission to inquire into the activities and conduct of Ilorin Native Authority towards its staff.

Allegations ranging from victimization, discrimination, and insecurity of their jobs among many others were levied against the council (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.). Details of the examples of each of the cases cited

were given to impress the Regional Government to consider their case from a new perspective (NAK/ILO/PROF/MLG/445/S.5 Vol.). To further strengthen their case, a delegation of the workers was dispatched to Kaduna to submit the petition directly to the Premier (Oba, 1984). The delegation also visited a number of ministers to carry them along in their demand for a probe into the activities of the new council in Ilorin Native Authority.

The vigour with which the workers pursued their case against the Council and the extent they went was far beyond the ability and the capability of the individual N. A. Staff or their proclaimed Workers' Union. Rather, it clearly points to the fact the Council staff challenging the council of the Ilorin Native Authority was fully backed by some powerful authorities. For instance, the appointment of Chief Richard Akinjide as the solicitor of the Ilorin "Worker's Union" cannot be said to be an accident. Being a member of an opposition party to the Action Group (AG), which was already in alliance with the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*, Chief Richard Akinjide's involvement in the case where AG's interest was visible, reveals that the rift between the Council and its staff in Ilorin had become a national one. It had actually become an inter political party affair. This meant therefore that the ITP/AG alliance Council in Ilorin was directly faced by NPC/NCNC alliance at the national level. The parties in alliance must have sensed the involvement of the Action Group (AG) in Ilorin council affairs as signal of danger to their interests in the area. Therefore, the engagement of Chief Richard Akinjide, a prominent member of the NCNC (an opposition to AG) to represent the Native Authority workers against the council, was the best it could do to face the Action Group (AG) which was the main backer of the revolutionary group in Ilorin (ITP).

The council was able to read ahead of the time and the situation. It saw the full involvement of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in its local dispute with the workers as a strong signal of the scheme to suffocate it. Therefore, in one of the council's meetings, a motion was formally moved to merge Ilorin to the Western Region (Salau, 1984). The adoption of the motion by majority vote of the council opened a new flank of reactions both within the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* ITP itself and outside it.

Reactions to the proposed Ilorin/West Merger

The mobilization of the selected staff of the Ilorin Native Authority against its council, which was borne out of fears of uncertainty both by the workers and their mentors at the local level of administration was the first phase of the crisis facing the ITP/AG alliance council. The second phase of the crisis was the general reactions against the decision of the council to merge Ilorin with the Western Region. Apart from the fact that the Ilorin traditional political institutions saw the proposal as a direct betrayer

of their own traditional values, they also saw it as unacceptable subjugation to their age long enemies and rivals. Consequently, the Ilorin traditional political authorities embarked on the campaign to make the people see the dangers in the merger of Ilorin with the Western Region (Oba, 1984). There was also reaction from the Islamic clerics. On their own, they saw the proposed merger as a direct threat to the purity of the Islamic religion (Oba, 1984). The clerics went ahead to impress on their followers that the merger will freely allow the infiltration of Ilorin by idol worshipers. It was the combined campaigns by the Indigenous Political class in Ilorin, the Islamic Clerics and the elite opposed to the merger proposal, that gradually eroded the unity among members of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP). For instance, a group led by Alhaji Ibrahim Laaro, who was one of the elected representatives on the platform of the ITP/AG Alliance, to the Northern House of Representatives, decided to form a faction of the Talaka Parapo that was opposed to the proposed merger of Ilorin to the Western Region (Salau, 1984). The group eventually returned to the fold of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) (Oba, 1984).

This disunity thus marked the beginning of the weakening of the ITP. The joint spirit required by the council to meet the challenges posed by the workers and in other areas of administration became shattered. The tempo of reforms embarked upon by the council was badly affected and the situation became so bad that more members of the Ilorin Talaka Parapo withdrew their support for the council.

The Northern Regional government saw an advantage in the opposition facing the ITP council and tried to exploit it. Consequently, it handed down very strong warning to the council for deviating from what the government considered as the essential standards of sound local government (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/5/C. Vol.II 1958). To the Regional government, a sound local government must, among other things, retain the respect, if not the political support, of the great number of the people and in particular of the responsible leaders of the community; "that it should adequately discharge the duties and responsibilities assigned to it, and that it should maintain high standards of honesty, morality and impartiality" (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/5/C. Vol.II 1958).

In reaction, the ITP/AG Alliance protested that the warning was politically motivated and that it was targeted at discouraging the Ilorin-West merger resolution which the council passed with a majority vote (Abdulfatai, 1987). It was also claimed that the refusal of the Regional government to see anything good in the Ilorin NA council under the ITP/AG Alliance as also political (Abdulfatai, 1987).

It was an irony of events that up till the time the Northern Regional government had to issue a warning to the Council, the council was of the opinion that it was on course and it thought that the support of both the *Emirate*

council and its workers never mattered to its decisions. The issuance of the warning therefore shows the true position of things (Abdulfatai, 1987).

It is not surprising, therefore, that in May, 1958, a three man committee was constituted by the Regional government to inquire into the activities of the ITP/AG led council. Mr. R. O. Mart, the Acting Northern Permanent Secretary for Social welfare and cooperatives, headed the committee. The other two members were Mallam Musa Alkalin Bida, and Mallam Yusuf Aminu, a member of the *Emir* of Kano's Court (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/5/C.1. Vol.II 1958).

The Committee's terms of reference were;

"To inquire into allegation that the Ilorin Native Authority (INA) has so misconduct or neglected its affairs that a situation has been created prejudicial to the interest of the Ilorin *Emirate* or to the interests of the region as a whole (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/5/C. Vol.II 1958).

In a sharp reaction to this committee of enquiry, the ITP/AG councilors protested strongly against the intent of setting up the committee. This was done through a resolution passed by the General Purpose Committee of the council. The council further expressed its concern and suspicion of the motives of the Regional government for setting up the committee of inquiry. It therefore rejected the constitution of the committee (Abdulfatai, 1987).

In its further condemnation of the committee of inquiry, the ITP/AG Alliance identified Mallam Musa Yusuf Aminu as Committed NA staff from the stronghold of the NPC, controlled government (Abdulfatai, 1987). As for the Chairman of the Committee, the basis of ITP/AG protest was that, as a staff of the Regional government, he was serving in the position of an accuser and the judge in the same case (Abdulfatai, 1987). Another area of concern to the ITP/AG Alliance over the enquiry was the fact that the allegations against the council were made public but the inquiry was to be held in camera.

As a result of these objections, the ITP/AG Alliance members of the council decided to snub the probe panel. The position of the council notwithstanding, the Committee went ahead to take evidence from the NPC councilors and other interested parties, which included the leaders of the workers of the Native Authority (Abdulfatai, 1987). However, in order to make the report of the committee acceptable and devoid of bias, the committee resorted to cross checking with oral evidence information obtained from minutes of council meetings (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/504.1958). The Committee was able to complete its assignment within record time and it submitted a report to the Regional government less than two months after it was constituted.

Based on the committee's recommendations, the

Northern Regional Government found the under listed allegations proved against the ITP/AG led council:

- a. that it used its powers to intimidate and victimize the political opponents of the ITP/AG;
- b. that it so mishandled staff matters that the whole local government machine was in danger of disruption;
- c. that because of party preoccupation, it had governed with growing inefficiency and thereby harmed its people;
- d. that it has split the people into different camps by insults and injustices towards both traditional officials and political opponents so that law and order were endangered.
- e. that the council had proved by its attitude towards impartial government officials who attempted to give advice that its present leaders were unable or unable to learn from their errors and unlikely to improve in future (NAK/ILO/PROF/NAL/504 1958).

It was on the basis of these proven allegations that the Northern Regional government formally dissolved the council and replaced it with an appointed caretaker committee in June 1958.

The Return of the Council of Ilorin NA to NPC

The replacement of the NA council dominated by members of ITP/AG Alliance with the caretaker council appointed by the Northern Regional government directly signaled the return of the NPC influence in Ilorin. Since the leaders of the NPC controlled the Northern Regional government, members of the party at the local level, clearly saw the appointment of the Caretaker Committee as the return of the Council to them. To the members of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (ITP), it was an unjustified denial of the democratically elected council to function. The Council saw the action of the Regional government as unwarranted collaboration to deny the people of Ilorin the right to secure their freedom through democratic process.

On assumption of office, the caretaker council reconstituted the Ilorin Town Council (Ilorin Provincial Report, 1959). It reduced the number of the elected councilors from fifty one to 34 thirty four (Ilorin Provincial Report, 1959). At the same time, the traditional membership of the council was increased from six to eighteen. The caretaker council therefore following these changes, a fresh election into the NA Council was scheduled along with Federal elections of December 1959 (Ilorin Provincial Report, 1959).

In the December elections, NPC was able to secure thirty-four seats, while the ITP/AG Alliance won only thirteen (Ilorin Provincial Report, 1959). From this, it is clear that the fortune of the ITP/AG alliance had begun to fall drastically. Thus, the NPC regained its traditional popularity, status and control over Ilorin (Kawu, 1983).

The choice of a literate *Emir* for Ilorin in 1959 after the

death of *Emir* AbdulKadir (1919 – 1959) was a deliberate scheme by the Regional government to ensure a good challenge to the revolutionary group symbolized by ITP/AG alliance. With the full support of the Regional government, the new *Emir* in Ilorin, Sulu (1959 – 1992) who was a former Court Registrar, and who lost election to an ITP candidate in the 1956 NA Council elections began to commit leaders of the ITP in Ilorin to various terms of imprisonments over trumped up charges (Kawu, 1983).

Many of the original strong supporters of the ITP/AG alliance at the inception of the struggles had returned to the NPC fold for social and political reasons. While some of them changed on the basis of the proposed Ilorin-West merger, others were intimidated by their immediate families to change their course (Kawu, 1983).

The changes in Ilorin between 1955 and 1959, which began as a political movement of the oppressed against the oppressors, marked an important phase in the sociopolitical relations amongst the diverse population of Ilorin. The *Talaka Parapo*, which began as a revolutionary group to defend the rights and privileges of the poor masses of Ilorin, ended up being infiltrated by the members of indigenous ruling class to reposition themselves within the power politics of the Emirate's administration.

The alliances between the groups in Ilorin with the external groups, such as that between ITP and AG and the Traditional ruling institution and the NPC, fully opened a new course of appraising the sociopolitical relations between the peoples of Ilorin on one hand and the people of Ilorin and the people of Northern Nigeria and those from the Southwest on the other hand. The changes recorded through the alliances with people from both the Southwest and Northern Nigeria clearly explain the dynamics of the cultural composition of Ilorin. It provided the Community the unique opportunity to freely interact with the people of both Northern and Southwestern Nigeria.

A general evaluation of intergroup relations in Ilorin between 1955 and 1959 shows that it was a product of class struggle between the indigenous ruling elites and the subject class, who had been carrying the heavy burden of both the indigenous administrative expenses and the unfriendly policies of the colonial administration. The window of opportunity to the subject class in Ilorin was the colonial administrative reforms embarked upon towards the last decades of its rule in Nigeria. The establishment of representational council at the level of the Native Authority and the establishment of Regional Houses of Representatives and Chiefs were some of these major reforms. While the membership of both the council for the Native Authority and the Regional House of Representatives were to be selected through the democratic process, members of the House of Chiefs were constituted by the indigenous ruling class.

The empowerment of the indigenous political institutions

in Ilorin by the colonial administration actually accounted for the successes recorded in the operation of the indirect rule system in the Emirate. Even though autocratic power given to the *Emir* was actualized on his control of the other political institutions in the Emirate, the role of the other chiefs such as *Balogun*, the *Magaji Aare*, the *Magajin Gari* and the *Baba Isale* though subordinate gave the common people of Ilorin the impression that they were all agents of oppression. It is not surprising therefore that *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*, directed its struggle against the entire indigenous ruling class. The suffocation of the revolutionary group in Ilorin, represented by the ITP was an illustration of nature of inter-party politics in Nigeria. By 1961 Regional elections, the electoral fortune had fully changed against the ITP/AG alliance in Ilorin. For instance, only one seat was won by the ITP/AG alliance in Ilorin south constituency, while the other seats were captured by the NPC. The results attest to the vigour with which the NPC was determined to win popularity among the Yoruba majority in Ilorin Emirate.

The creation of autocratic rule in Ilorin Emirate naturally opened the subject class of heavy burden of taxation and other harsh conditions. This eventually mobilized the people to seize the advantage of the democratic principles introduced by the colonial administration. The evolution of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*, their mobilization and alliance with Action Group AG brought about the first political challenge experienced in the history of Ilorin, between the indigenous ruling elites and the subject class.

The victory of ITP/AG alliance in 1956 elections was a clear demonstration of democratic powers by which the common people of Ilorin was for once, able to secure a relief. The coalition of forces that eventually truncated the tenure of ITP/AG controlled council of Ilorin Native Authority, clearly illustrates the externalization of the political trends in Ilorin.

CONCLUSION

The death of *Emir* AbdulKadir (1919 – 1959) toward the end of 1959 and the enthronement of *Emir* Sulu Karnani Gambari (1959 – 1992) within the same year accelerated the scheme to suppress the revolutionary group, the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* that had been in alliance with the Action Group AG. The persecution of the leaders of the *Talaka parapo* was the final stage to complete the eradication of all forms of oppositions to the absolute control of the Traditional institutions in the Emirate.

The Choice of Sulu Karnani Gambari as the successor to *Emir* AbdulKadir was indeed deliberate. He was specifically chosen to meet the situation of the time. The tempo of the time was western literacy. A literate *Emir* in Ilorin was specifically required to meet the challenges posed to the traditional political institutions by the radical masses as epitomized by the members of ITP.

Emir Sulu Karnani Gambari, being one of the NPC candidates that lost to the candidate of *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* in the 1958/57 elections, appreciated the enormous support enjoyed by the ITP/AG alliance which made it win majority seat in the NA Council. He was therefore determined to prevent a repeat of such sad experience in the history of Ilorin Emirate.

With the full support of the Northern Regional Government the new *Emir* in Ilorin, Sulu Karnani Gambari, immediately swung into action. This he did, by incriminating leaders of the *Talaka Parapo*, one after the other. Each of them was hastily tried and sentenced to prison (Kawu, 1983). This created palpable fears in the majority of common people of Ilorin. On the other hand, the traditional ruling class in Ilorin who were sympathetic to the course of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* made up of the *Emir*, *Balogun* and other Chiefs, assumed the posture of absolute rulers (Kawu, 1983).

The *Emir*, appreciating the absolute status of his office, began to operate as law unto himself. For instance, he gave unilateral judgments in his court and he even operated court sessions at night (Kawu, 1983). The common men in Ilorin naturally became apprehensive of the consequences of the absolute powers exercised by the *Emir*. Therefore, most of them who saw the excesses of the *Emir* foresaw dangers in the absolute nature of the exercise of his powers. Therefore, they anticipated that it will be short lived (Kawu, 1983)

The climate of fears and uncertainty could be said to have pervaded Ilorin community before Nigeria's political independence in 1960. This, however, prepared ground for another phase of resistance against the *Emir's* powers in the post independence period.

The appointment of *Emir* Sulu Karnani Gambari in 1959, the enormous support he enjoyed from the Northern Regional government, the support of the NPC as a party and the exercise of the *Emir's* authoritarian powers, actually created new phases of intergroup relations in Ilorin. On one hand, it consolidated relations between the traditional ruling class made up of the *Emir* himself, the *Balogun*, the *Magajin Gari*, the *Magaji Aare*, the *Baba Isale* and the *Alanguwa* or the District Heads. On the other hand, the ruling class and majority of the Ilorin population were also united against the revolutionary group, represented by the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*. Indeed, the proposal of the ITP/AG controlled Ilorin Native Authority Council between 1956/1957 accounted for the council losing some of its prominent members to the fold of the NPC and the traditional ruling class.

The successful isolation of the remaining members of the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo*, opened them up for direct persecution which was completed with the appointment of *Emir* Sulu Karnani Gambari. This phase of relations between the traditional ruling class, through which, the implementation of colonial policies, placed heavy burden on the poor masses of Ilorin and the majority of the poor

masses that formed the ITP was a new one in intergroup relations.

The persecution of members of the ITP which resulted in the arrest of its leaders, their summary court trials and sentence to terms of imprisonments marked the end of once powerful political revolutionary movement in Ilorin. Unconsciously, however, the *Emir* had become so powerful that he saw himself as the absolute authority in Ilorin.

The breakdown of relations between the NPC party leaders, led by Alhaji Buhari Edun and the *Emir*, resulting from the attempt of the party leaders to check the excesses of the *Emir*, was the last phase of relations on the eve of Nigeria independence.

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