



Below are excerpts from the topic "Unitarianism or Federations?" as in the book "Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution" written by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and published by the Oxford University Press in 1966.

Unitarianism or Federalism?

one ethnic group to another, but also sometimes within each national group. In this connexion, it must be confessed that Christian and Moslem beliefs and practices are, with many a Nigerian, nothing but veneers and social facades; at heart and in the privacy of their lives, most Nigerian Christians and Moslems are heathens and animists.

Until 1946 when the Richards Constitution came into operation, the highest and biggest arena for political activities for interested Nigerians was the divisional (Native Authority) level. Our appearance, as Nigerians, on the regional and national governmental scenes started somewhat feebly, and under close British tutelage, only in 1946—some 20 years ago.

All these factors which we have adumbrated in the five preceding paragraphs are natural and automatic generators of centrifugal forces and tendencies. They tend to induce in the ethnic groups concerned a strong and burning desire for separate existence from one another. They are factors which, if they had not been restrained and skillfully canalized by the British, would have led to the emergence of several independent sovereign states in the place of the One Nigeria we now have.

The credit for sublimating these natural desires and tendencies of the various ethnic groups for separate

Africa, Europe, Australia, America, or Asia—exhibits the same general characteristics and evinces the same reaction under a given political situation. For instance, no man is ever permanently attuned to oppression and tyranny; sooner or later, the oppressed and tyrannized will, if need be, recover their freedom and assert it. Again, fundamental human rights are recognized and appreciated everywhere, and no one is happy if he is arbitrarily deprived of any of them. Even the savage or primitive man was reported to be very pleased when he enjoyed, among other things, the right of life, to free speech, movement, and association; although, if he had the power to enforce his capricious will, he would not hesitate to deny the same sources of pleasure to his neighbours and those under his sway.

Undoubtedly, political principles are by no means as exact and immutable as the principles or laws of physical and natural sciences. Nevertheless, certain events of history have shown, again and again, that who ignore or believe they can circumvent such political principles as are well established do so at their own peril or at the cost of the welfare and happiness of their people.

In other words, we make bold to assert that at this stage in the evolution of man, it is possible to discern political

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principles or laws of universal application which must determine the type of constitution best suited to a given country. It is also possible, in the face of such general principles, to declare and predict that any wide departure from them, in identical cases and circumstances, is bound to come to grief sooner or later.

It is incumbent upon us, therefore, in making a choice

THE only thing which distinguishes a unitary from a federal constitution is where the supreme legislative authority in the state resides. As we have noted earlier on, in the case of a unitary constitution the supreme legislative authority in the state is vested in one government. Whereas in the case of a unitary federal constitution, the supreme legislative authority is shared between the general or central government and the regional provincial, state governments all of which are coordinate with and independent of one another in regard to the powers and functions expressly or by necessary implication vested in them by the constitution.

The question to which we have to address ourselves now is why one of these two types of constitution should be preferred to the other for Nigeria?

The diversity of Nigeria is well known. There are, however, certain features of this diversity which, because of their importance and strict relevance to our discussion, deserve special mention and attention.

The area of Nigeria is 356,669 square miles. Compared with the U.S.S.R., Communist China, and the USA with 8.7 million, 3.4 million and 2.9 million square miles respectively, our country's size is nothing to boast of. But not so when the grounds for comparison are shifted and the facts are made known that Nigeria is bigger in size than France plus the two Germans, and that, with a population of 55.6 million, it is the ninth largest country in the world.

It has been estimated that there are about 250 national or ethnic groups in the country each with its own distinct language. Until it is officially or otherwise authoritatively confirmed, we should dismiss this figure as both fantastic and unreliable. In any case, there are ten principal national groups in Nigeria which constitute about 80 per cent of the entire population. They are (population figure in brackets): Hausa/Fulani (13.6 million); Yoruba (13 million); Ibo (7.8 million); EriK/Ibibio (3.2 million); Kanuri (2.9 million); Tiv (1.5 million); Ijaw (0.9 million) Edo (0.9 million) I Urhobo (0.6 million); Nupe (0.5 million). These ten and the other national groups, who are still to be identified separately, are diverse in their origins, and speak different languages.

In many respects, their cultural patterns, political institutions, social standards, and customary usages differ very widely.

The geographical features of the country vary enormously from Akassa and Opobo in the south to Kaura Namoda and Kukaawa in the north.

Indigenous religious beliefs and practices, which, to a great extent, are still resistant to the proselytizing influences of Christianity and Mohammedanism, vary not only from

between a unitary and a federal constitution, to endeavour to discover, from the empirical facts constitution, to endeavour to discover, from the empirical facts which political history supplies, and from the empirical facts which political scientists and analysts have reacted, whether there are any patent and well-established political principles by which our action can be guided. And if we discover them, to follow them with objective fidelity, whatever our predilections, personal feelings or secret aspirations. It is natural, in political discussions especially those relating to the making of a new constitution immediately after a revolution, that a good ideal of emotion and sentiment should come into play. But in this connexion, two important points must be borne strictly and vividly in mind.

Firstly, emotion may be likened to a driverless vehicle in greatly accelerated motion. The terrible danger which such a vehicle constitutes to its occupants and other road users should go without saying. But this vehicle can have a driver: subjective reason or intuition is one, objective reason is another. Subjective reason or intuition (except in religion where it may pass for divine revelation) is an unscientific and unreliable driver. In contrast, however, objective reason is a scientific and reliable driver whose credentials and competence, unlike those of subjective reason, are verifiable and demonstrable. We are fully aware that a famous saying has it that 'emotion rules the world'. No wonder then that the countries of the world are always in collision with one another, and know no peace or harmony!

Secondly, the formulation of a constitution for a country is a solemn and grave undertaking. Those who are privileged to be charged with this solemn and grave responsibility need much more than mere emotional impulses and unreflective patriotic assignment of fashioning a new constitution for Nigeria we need emotional impulses and patriotic sentiments in large measure. They will provide us, as we have noted, with a powerful fast moving vehicle. But we must, as a matter of unavoidable necessity, see to it that objective reason takes the steering, in order that the safety of our journey and of our arrival at our desired destination may be fully and confidently guaranteed.

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