

ZIKIST MOVEMENT: THE TRUEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE NIGERIAN NATIONALIST ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

Since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, the Zikist Movement was arguably the most dreaded organisation by the British colonialists. Yet this group of brave young men who led the most belligerent struggle for Nigeria's independence are rarely recognised in Nigeria's nationalists discuss. This research looked at the impact of the Zikist Movement, a group of young Nigerians, in exterminating colonialism in Nigeria. The study focussed on the years between 1945 and 1951 when the Movement existed. It was a radical movement of young people, aggressively anti-imperialist, who took inspiration from Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, the foremost Nigerian nationalist popularly called 'Zik of Africa'. It took the name Zikist and engaged in various acts of colonial disobedience. At that time Zik took pride in the movement that bore his name and endorsed it. By 1950, however, the Zikist movement was outlawed and the British government began offering a mild form of self-government to Nigerians based on the principle of federalism. Zik then radically alters his rhetoric by condemning and denouncing the Zikist movement. However, through primary sources, this study finds out that this group of young Nigerians who are marginalised in Nigerian nationalist discuss, were the most impactful group in the later stage of Nigerian struggle for independence from the British.

Keywords: Zikist Movement, Zikism, Colonialism, Nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of the (Zikist) Movement is largely nationalistic with a strong admixture of Communist Party terminologies, the adoption of Marxist philosophy and a complete opposition to Colonial Government in any of its forms. The Movement is frankly revolutionary and considers that the present order of society must be destroyed in order effectively to build the new order. Although some attempt is made to pretend that such a revolution can be achieved by peaceful means, particularly by non-cooperation there is no doubt that it is the intention of

the leaders of the Movement to encourage violent revolution whenever possible. It is known that members of the Movement have accumulated stores of arms and ammunition and that plans have been made to encourage any acts of sabotage and assassination.¹

After going through several primary historical materials, I got to realise that the Zikist Movement has been ostracised in Nigerian nationalists discuss. Most historians, other scholars and even colonial officials have misrepresented the position of the Zikists. In *Background to Nationalism*, J.S. Coleman describes the Movement as merely an appendage of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC).² While Sir John Macpherson, the Governor-General of Nigeria regarded the group as the radical wing of the NCNC.³ Also Gbenenye claims that the Movement was aimed at “usurping authority unconstitutionally”.⁴ This claim is questionable because the Zikists who are Nigerians were trying to liberate their people from illegitimate invaders. Furthermore, Olusanya in *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939 – 1953* inaccurately describes the Zikist Movement as an organisation aimed at merely to protect the life of Nnamdi Azikiwe.⁵ Likewise, in *Nigeria and Ghana*, John E. Flint focuses merely on the communist ideology of the group and less on the nationalist achievements of the group.⁶ Most researchers have continually discussed Zikist Movement as an offshoot of NCNC whereas Osita Agwuna, its Secretary unequivocally declared that “the NCNC and the Zikist Movement have the same object...but the Zikist Movement and the National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroons are two separate entities”.⁷

This research discovers that these representations are wrong, demeaning and totally inaccurate. The Movement which was formed in 1946 due to the slow pace of Nigeria’s advancement to self-determination,⁸ was guided by the Gandhian non-violent disobedience to colonialists before it became more bellicose. Their ideology was Zikism as interpreted by Nwafor Orizu in his book *Without Bitterness* with a foundation based on Azikiwe’s *Renascent Africa*.⁹ This study tries to reposition the place of the Zikist Movement in the independence struggle of Nigeria as an

¹ CO 537/5801: ‘The Zikist Movement in Nigeria’, March 1950

² J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (Berkeley, 1958), p. 298

³ CO 537/7171: ‘The Zikist Movement’

⁴ E.M. Gbenenye, Political Unrest and Agitational Politics of Decolonisation in Eastern Nigeria, *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, Vol. 5, Issue 6, (June 2016), pp. 64 – 73, p. 64

⁵ G.O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939 – 1953*, (Lagos, 1973), p. 115

⁶ See J.E. Flint, *Nigeria and Ghana* (Ghana, Prentice-Hall, 1966).

⁷ KV 2/1818: Dr. Azikiwe; and *West African Pilot*, 29th October 1948

⁸ CO 537/7171: The Zikist Movement’

⁹ Nnamdi Azikiwe was only an inspiration for the youths, he had no hand in the formation or their activities.

organisation which was probably the greatest and arguably the truest nationalist movement in the later stage of Nigerian colonialism. By reappraising the role of Zikist Movement, the struggle that actually quickened the road to independence of \Nigeria is re-evaluated, and the true heroes of Nigerian nationalist struggle are identified. This study also come at a time where Nigeria has economically stagnated for the past ten years, bedevilled by corrupted and dishonest leaders and the political leaders are deliberately suppressing the youths from attaining political positions like what happened between 1945 and 1950.

REASONS FOR THE FORMATION OF THE ZIKIST MOVEMENT

Between 1941 and 1947, Nigerian political leadership at this period was bankrupt, ineffective, and uninspiring. The nationalist movement had been badly divided since the Ikoli-Akinsanya crisis in 1941.¹⁰ The leaders, instead of uniting to challenge the colonial administration, the leaders engaged themselves with pettiness, tribalism, rancour, jealousy, and mutual antipathy. The organisation which could claim a national following during this period, the National Congress of Nigerians and the Cameroons, though effective in the realm of political propaganda with its arrays of newspapers, was impotent in that of positive action. But by I948 the N.C.N.C. had ceased to be politically active. The party had been frustrated by the lack of success of the 1947 delegation it sent to Britain to protest the Richards Constitution. Eta Iyo attempted to explain the inactivity of the party by stating: 'We are not extinct, but dormant volcanoes waiting for the time when we can explode';¹¹ and Azikiwe commented on his inaction in similar term. Consequently, a political void was created, which the Zikist Movement naturally stepped into. Many young men who had been disillusioned by the N.C.N.C. and frustrated by its inactivity rallied to the Zikist banner and the Movement now declared that the age of positive action had come.

Secondly, the achievement of independence by India and Pakistan in August I947 was not without its effect on the Zikists. India's political progress had been keenly followed in Nigeria and her struggle applauded. The attainment of independence by India, at a time when Nigerian leaders seemed confused, bewildered, undecided and therefore impotent, spurred on the young people to greater efforts. Thirdly, in Ghana in February I 948, the nationalists led a riot which led

¹⁰ E. Ikoli and S.A. Akinsanya were rivals within the Nigerian Youth Movement for nomination to contest a seat in the Legislative Council left vacant by Dr K. Abayomi, who was proceeding to Britain for further studies. The Movement was split into two; and Dr N. Azikiwe, who had already been rejected for nomination, supported Akinsanya. Many believed that this was not on principle but out of a desire to make capital from the trouble and thus destroy the Movement. The fact that Azikiwe then resigned from it, and was followed out by all the Ibo members, aroused the suspicion of others

¹¹ *West African Pilot*, 6th April 1949

to some political concessions to the nationalists by the British. This convinced this freedom seeking young Nigerians that what was needed was a practical demonstration of their wishes along the lines of what had happened in Ghana. All these factors were responsible for the transformation of the Zikist Movement into a more dynamic and radical organisation.¹²

FORMATION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Zikist Movement, which was also known as ‘Young Africa Congress’¹³ was initiated by Kolawole Balogun, its first president general who in search of a more aggressive and effective nationalist response invited about twenty prominent young men, principally fellow journalists from Lagos, asking their opinion on the current national predicament.¹⁴ Their response was the creation of the Zikist Movement on 16th February 1946, in which M.C.K. Ajuluchuku, Nduka Eze and Abiodun Aloba, joined Balogun as the founding fathers. Others founding members includes; G. Onyeagbula, G. Ebo, Raji Abdallah, S. Aderibigbe, M. Aina and J. Inoma, Ogedengbe Macaulay, and Andrew Agams.¹⁵ Perturbed by the ineffective nationalist action and slow pace of attaining self- determination for Nigeria, the Zikists made it their major aim to revitalise the nationalist movement after the long inaction of the then foremost nationalist organisation, National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. Due to their access to publicity, Ajuluchuku, Aluba and Balogun who were rising stars in the newspaper field; employed as editors and assistant editors in the *West African Pilot* could give publicity to the cause, and thus had profound influence over what the general population read and the ideas it encountered. Eze also worked with the labour movement, providing a connection with a broader spectrum of the population.¹⁶

Eze tour round the country on behalf of the group making connections and creating branches of the organisation in all communities¹⁷ making them the most pan-Nigerian nationalist network. Ajuluchuku claimed that by 1947, the Movement had twenty-nine branches throughout Nigeria¹⁸ with a membership of about 2500¹⁹ even though the British officials claim they were just about

¹² G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 326

¹³ CO 537/5801: *The Constitution of the Zikist Movement*

¹⁴ *West African Pilot*, 19th February 1946

¹⁵ *West African Pilot*, 19th February 1946

¹⁶ Iweriebor, Ehiedu E.G., *Radical Politics in Nigeria, 1945-1950: The Significance of the Zikist Movement*. Zaria (Nigeria): Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1996, p. 33

¹⁷ *West African Pilot*, 12th June 1946

¹⁸ W. Ademoyega, *The Federation of Nigeria* (London: Harrap, 1962), p. 135

¹⁹ E.E.G. Iweriebor, *Radical Politics...* p. 39

800 – 900 in total.²⁰ Zikist Movement was dedicated to advancement in five sectors: political, economic, cultural, social and welfare, and educational.²¹ And their membership came from variety of backgrounds, including young teachers, students, ex-servicemen, traders, clerks, artisans, and journalists.²² The four founding fathers gave voice to the prevalent belief in the vast deficiencies of past nationalist movements, affirming the use of radical action in the nationalist cause stressing that “We have talked much and written a lot about our desire for self-rule. But it is not mere talking and mere writing that will help us through the colossal task that is ahead of us”.²³

The Movement distinguished itself more by action than by ideas; even though it was ideological with socialist orientation, its efforts were mainly concentrated on destroying the order of the day-colonial rule with a proper process of how to set up the new order. There was little thought of the detailed organization of the future State and the motive power of the movement was the destruction of the old state machine which had become oppressive and repressive; the youthful spirit of adventure in the young men, the righteousness of their cause, the consciousness that through their little efforts, however misdirected or misconceived, their country advanced steadily to her Canaan, the feelings that historical necessity was on their side and the ineffable joy of serving the highest cause in the world-the liberation of mankind-were all that mattered to the youths whose mystic faith in the triumph of their cause was astounding.²⁴

From what can be gathered from the Zimo Newsletter, where most of their ideas were to be found, their nationalism extended beyond the frontiers of Nigeria. They advocated a West African Socialist Union. But in this they were unrealistic, for they failed to take into consideration the basic difficulty-the lack of a West African outlook except amongst very few fervent nationalists. They also demanded the nationalisation of the basic industries, fundamental human rights, the maximisation of social services and employment opportunities, direct action against imperialism and extensive development of the co-operative movement.²⁵

According to the constitution of the Zikist Movement, the aims and objectives of the Zikist Movement includes:

²⁰ CO 538/5807: The Zikist Movement

²¹ *West African Pilot*, 25th April 1946

²² *West African Pilot*, 5th October 1946

²³ *West African Pilot*, 2nd March 1946

²⁴ M. Okoye, *Storms on the Niger: A Story of Nigeria's Struggle* (Eastern Nigeria Printing Corporation, Enugu), pp. 140 - 141

²⁵ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 325

1. To study objectively, practice conscientiously and promulgate courageously the principles of Zikism as conceived by Aggrey and Marcus Garvey and as developed and Interpreted by Zik in his "Renascent Africa" and allied teachings, and as propounded in its philosophical form by Nwafor Orizu.
2. To strive toward the redemption of Africa, through the establishment of an Independent United States of West Africa, the establishment of the "Zikist way of Life" in Africa and all the world over and the virtual achievement of the objects of Zikism in society.
3. To encourage popular Interest In all activities, events and practices that affect the progress and destiny of Africa, in International politics, political economy, comparative religion and sociology and all such other sciences that make for a harmonious understanding between peoples.
4. To co-operate and collaborate with any organization of like mind in Africa or abroad having for Its objects the promotion of mental emancipation, social regeneration, spiritual balance, political resurgimento and economic determinism in society.
5. To establish, participate in or carry on the business of the printing or publishing of a general newspaper or newspapers, or of journals, magazines, pamphlets or other publications, or of any other undertakings, Industrial or otherwise, in the Interest of the Movement and Zikism generally.²⁶

ZIKISTS' INTERPRETATION OF ZIKISM

Although, the Zikists were described as 'rascals and 'irresponsible'²⁷, the Zikist Movement was arguably the most ideologically driven nationalist group in the later part of the independence struggle of Nigeria. The foundation of Zikism was laid by Nnamdi Azikiwe with his book *Renascent Africa* in 1937 but it was verbose, less comprehensive and lacked an articulate process of achieving African emancipation. However, Nwafor Orizu in 1944 came up with *Without Bitterness* which built on the ideology of Zik as it projects the attainment of African irredentism. Orizu claims that:

I have coined the philosophy of 'Zikism' to express the unconscious yearnings of my soul . . . Zikism is irredentism. It is a God-sanctioned plan. It is a rejuvenated universal philosophy; it is not jingoism; it is not racialism; it is not anarchism; it is

²⁶ The aims and objectives of the Movement are in its constitution. Their vision was more global in outlook, seeking for freedom not only in Nigeria but all over Africa, Asia and the West Indies. For the Constitution, See, CO 538/5801, National Archives, London

²⁷ The British officials did not think highly of them. See, CO 538/5807: 'Report from West Africa'

not monistic; it is not sarcastic; it is not apologetic. It is faith in life, a creative impulse-Zikism must grow and spread on social myth; namely, African irredentism, which must mean 'the redemption of Africa from social wreckage, political servitude and economic impotency'. Africa is then to be saved from ideological confusion, psychological immaturity, spiritual complacency and mental stagnation.²⁸

The central themes of Orizu's interpretation of Zikism includes Political Zikism, Social Zikism, Economic Zikism and Religious Zikism.²⁹ 'Political Zikism' criticises colonialism as illegitimate and an aberration declaring that:

Zikism does not quarrel with law and order and political organization in Africa, but they must be the law of the people to be legal. The order must come from popularly established authorities of the people to be obeyed. Political organisation must be the handiwork of the people, for the people, to be accepted. It does not aim at a change of authority in an old imperialistic structure of government but a totally new state which will usher in a new Africa.³⁰

The 'Social Faith' of Zikism is based on the social myth of 'African Irredentism'. Orizu argues that this social myth is the foundation which provides the inspiration for the members to keep struggling to achieve their objectives:

African irredentism must mean the redemption of Africa from social wreckage, political servitude and economic impotency; it also means extricating Africa from ideological confusion, psychological immaturity, spiritual complacency, and mental stagnation. It must mean the development of a new literature by Africans to interpret African culture realistically to other peoples.³¹

Like Azikiwe, Orizu presents 'Economic Zikism' as a mixed economy which is a combined less state control of certain economic sectors with a larger framework of capitalism. The development of Nigeria's economy would be based on the promotion of African capitalism, augmented by scientific planning, agricultural development, and industrialization.³² Lastly, 'Religious Zikism' according to Orizu is tied to the believe of a universal God that is significant in the nationalist

²⁸ N. Orizu, *Without Bitterness: Western Nations in Post War Africa*, (New York, Creative Age Press, 1944), p.306

²⁹ These themes of Zikism appear universal in objective as they attempt to rid the world of imperialism. See, N. Orizu, *Without Bitterness...* pp. 297 - 301

³⁰ Orizu, *Without Bitterness...* p. 335

³¹ Orizu, *Without Bitterness...* p. 306

³² Orizu, *Without Bitterness...* pp. 317 - 321

cause in Nigeria. After all, the British gave the impression of Christian civilizing mission in Africa. As such, the universal God should rescue Nigerian people from the domination of the British. This religious theme reflects how spiritual Africans are; always attributing their problems to divinity but with time, the young Zikists could not wait for God to intervene on behalf Nigeria as they took 'Positive Action'. The second President-General of the Movement, Abdallah expatiated on the interpretation of Zikism:

Zikism was a humanist philosophy anchored on the belief in freedom and implacable opposition to domination in any form. "In Zikism, there is no place for prejudices – be they social, racial, economic or political, ethnical and religious. Zikism stands for brotherhood, equality and unity Zikism believes in freedom for all men, not freedom for a few. It believes in practical as opposed to mere theoretical or rhetorical democracy. Zikism is not rash but rational, it is not rebellious but firm and outspoken. It does not hate anybody but opposed to slavery from any quarter. Zikism and imperialism are irreconcilable."³³

Without Bitterness is supposed to be a build-up on *Renascent Africa*, but Zikism as interpreted by Orizu actually complicates the thoughts of Azikiwe. Zikism is not properly elaborated. It is ambivalent and confusing. It lacks direction as to a pragmatic plan of action in achieving freedom from colonialism for Africa. Although it opines a combination of capitalism, socialism and welfarism for a sustainable Africa, it provides no strategies for achieving it. This is probably why it was not a decisive policy for Nigeria or any country at the attainment of independence. The ambiguity of Zikism also played a vital role in the disorderly nature of the execution of the Zikists' plans. Because the ideology was not articulate, the plans were formless and execution haphazard.

ZIKISTS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Aside Nnamdi Azikiwe's ideology of *Renascent Africa*, the second ideology that generally influenced the Zikist was the 'Satyagraha' of Mahatma Gandhi of India. In the constitution of the Zikist Movement, it states that "in striving towards the attainment of the objects, Zikism shall be guided by the principle of brotherhood and equality of men, and where forced to tangents of antagonism to the principle of satyagraha, if only to safeguard full and unbridled life for all men and ultimately to fulfil the hopes of a world fellowship".³⁴ The Movement adopted the principles of satyagraha because "in the absence of material force, the satyagraha believes... by disciplined application of his moral power in defiance of violent tyranny and by non-cooperation, strikes,

³³ *West African Pilot*, 13th August 1947

³⁴ CO 537/5801: 'The Constitution of Zikist Movement'

boycotts, sanctions and demonstrations he might oblige the oppressor to listen to his demands. Non-co-operation is essentially the notion that it is shameful to assist the oppressor in maintaining his domination.”³⁵

The French Revolution also contributed to the philosophy of the Zikist Movement. For instance, in the ‘A Call For Revolution’ issued by Agwuna, he called upon the people of Nigeria to:

Pursue a lasting pearl that is freedom, MUST DAMN RELIGIOUS AND HUMANIST INHIBITIONS and,...let us fight for the honour of smashing the present Imperialist State machine BY AS FOUL AND VICIOUS METHODS AS WITH WHICH WE ARE STILL CAPTIVATED.... MUST EMBRACE ACTIVE REVOLUTION AS THE CURRENT WORLD ORDER, MUST EMBRACE THE SCIENTIFIC USE OF FORCE ‘for justice without force, it is said, is powerless; and force without justice is tyranny’.³⁶

The above statement is a direct interpretation of Maximilien Robespierre’ famous “terror without virtue is cruel but virtue without terror is impotent”³⁷ during the French Revolution against King Louis XVI. For the Zikists, the British colonialists represented the ‘France Monarchy and Nobles’ who deserve some justice mixed with terror. The Zikists also declared that “our campaign will not be limited to imperialism, but it will be carried out against African nationals and semi-nationals, institutions, organisations, and establishments that are opposed in any way to our march towards immediate irredentism, for the enemy is not less a danger than his ally”.³⁸ This was also like what happened during the French Revolution.

Lastly, the communist ideology of USSR through the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) gave them an alternative premise to fight against colonialism. Even after the organisation was ban, “in November 1950, out of a total of seventy sacks of second-class mail, six were taken at random and examined; in each sack examined, there were 1,000 communist pamphlets, and it was estimated that 50,000 pamphlets must have entered Nigeria by one mail boat alone”.³⁹ And there was an increased number of Cold War propaganda, anti-colonial propaganda, newspapers, pamphlets and periodical critiques sent to private addresses despite the fact that the people could not pay for them.⁴⁰ Zikism itself has some elements of Marxism as discussed earlier and this

³⁵ M. Okoye, *Vistas of Life: A Survey of Views and Visions*, Enugu: Eastern Nigeria Printing Corporation, 1962

³⁶ Emphasis in original document. See, CO 537/1717: ‘A Call For Revolution’

³⁷ M. Linton, The Choices of Maximilien Robespierre, *H-France Salon*, Vol. 7, Issue 14, No.3, 2015, pp. 1-10, p.1

³⁸ *West African Pilot*, 31st December 1947

³⁹ See, M Okoye, *A Letter to Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), p 56

⁴⁰ CO 968/353: Benion to Shaw and Hujisman, November 1950, PRO, London

continued to unify them and irritate the colonialists.⁴¹

ACTIVITIES OF THE MOVEMENT

The first task of the Movement at this stage was to recruit enough following. Success came easily. There were many young men and women who were eager for positive action and who were prepared to follow anybody or any organisation that would provide them with excitement. Consequently, teachers, students, and trade unionists poured forth to join. To give more romance to the Movement, a flag was adopted consisting of five colours and a red star, and a uniform of white suit and red tie.⁴² Their main weapons in the struggle of the Movement were strikes, boycotts, pickets, and non-violent civil disobedience campaigns, but the two most potent were politicised strikes and the boycott movement.⁴³ Apart from frequent public lectures and extensive private discussions, they began also publishing the monthly *Zimo Newsletter*, pamphlets such as 'What Satyagraha Means to Us', 'A Call for Revolution', 'Workers of Nigeria, Revolt', and other publications designed to diffuse their ideas far and wide.⁴⁴ Their contents were directly revolutionary in nature. For instance, in 'A Call for Revolution', all native proprietors of schools who had suffered injustice in the wards of grants-in-aid were admonished to imbue in their people a spirit of contempt and hate for the colonialists and for the British Empire in which they formed a plebeian class, and to boycott, along with other nations, the commemoration of Empire Day a day in which 'our slavery was consummated'.⁴⁵

It urged people to stop paying direct tax, in order to paralyse Britain's economy, and the money paid instead to national organisations. That people should refuse to offer themselves for military service to the British in the event of wars, and all policemen were called upon to disobey the imperialist's command of beating down unarmed workers or peaceful nationalist demonstrations. Leaders of present organisations and social and cultural societies should inculcate the new philosophy of revolution in their people, and should denounce and combat the suppressive system of imperialism. The *Zimo Newsletters* further encouraged young people take up interest in military tactics, and called upon them to organise for intensive picketing, deliberate group defiance of tyranny, and various forms of underground activity. *Workers of Nigeria, Revolt* contained statements such as 'You should revolt, hate every European in Nigeria, protest against Nigeria becoming a military and police state; don't fear to attack any European or African who stands in your way to freedom'; and it concluded with 'Touch-read, digest and pass on to your

⁴¹ CO 537/5807: 'The Zikist Movement'

⁴² CO 537/5801: The Constitution of the Zikist Movement; See also, M. Okoye, *The Storms...* p. 137

⁴³ CO 537/5807: 'The Zikist Movement'

⁴⁴ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 327

⁴⁵ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 327

friends'.⁴⁶

Another significant Positive Action of the Zikist Movement was its response to the racist incidence at Bristol Hotel, Lagos on 22nd February 1947. Ivor Cummings, a black of Sierra Leonean decent and a staff of the British government in London was refused accommodation into Bristol Hotel due to his colour.⁴⁷ The Zikist condemned this calling for an end to racism in the country and a deportation of the European staff involved. With the colonialists not responding to their demands, the Zikists organised the youths to demonstrate at the front of the hotel bombarding the hotel with stones endlessly. Though the protesters were dispersed by the Police with several of them injured,⁴⁸ the Governor capitulated by banning all forms of racism in Nigeria and the hotel employee was expelled.

Furthermore, the Zikists used direct action with their demonstration against the Agriculture Ordinance of 1947 by Governor Arthur Richards. This ordinance was set to "provide for the regulation of the growing of agricultural crops, for the control of plant diseases and pests and for the preparation, marketing, storage, transporting, shipping and export of agricultural produce".⁴⁹ But Nigerians interpreted it as \Nigerian economy merely becoming a source of raw materials for British economy.() The Zikist Movement organised a mass meeting in 29th June 1947, which attracted thousands of concerned Nigerians to speak against the bill. And on 31st August 1947, a five-man delegate of the meeting⁵⁰ met with the Director of Agriculture, A.G. Beattle to register their concerns and demanded a repeal of the bill. In April 1948, the new Governor, John Macpherson claimed that the ordinance was 'too negative and not inspirational', and amended it.⁵¹ Another success of direct positive action of the Zikists.

As some of the leaders were trade unionists, it was quite easy for them to organise strikes. The intention of using this tactic was basically to weaken the economy of the country-and if possible to some extent the British economy too-and to create discontent and hatred for the colonialists within Nigeria.⁵² To get a strong hold on Labour movement, the Movement created an alternative national labour union, Nigerian National Federation of Labour (NNFL) with a membership of

⁴⁶ CO 537/1717: 'The National Programme'

⁴⁷ John Flint, "Scandal at the Bristol Hotel: Some Thoughts on Racial Discrimination in Britain and West Africa and Its Relationship to the Planning of Decolonisation, 1939-1947," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. XII, no. 1, October 1983, pp.74-93

⁴⁸ *Nigerian Spokesman*, 14 March 1947

⁴⁹ E.E.G. Iweriebor, *Radical Politics...* p. 112

⁵⁰ The five representatives included Dr. Maja, Mbonu Ojike, K.O.K Onyioha, H.O. Davies, and Rotimi Williams. *West African Pilot*, 1 August 1947

⁵¹ *West African Review*, October 1947

⁵² G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 326

twenty labour unions, to rival the popular Trade Union Congress (TUC) which was not cooperating with the Zikists.⁵³ NNFL immediately demanded for a minimum wage for Nigerian workers since rent and costs of food was high. It also went on a five and a half month of nationwide sensitisation tour promoting national unity and labour concerns.() one the labour unions in NNFL, Amalgamated Union of United Africa Company Workers (UNAMAG) under the leadership of Nduka Eze who was also the President-General of the Zikists then went on a ten days strike from 2nd to 11th of August after UAC turned down its demand of twelve and a half percent increase in the Cost of Living Allowance, effectively paralysing the activities of UAC in Lagos and the Provinces.⁵⁴ The effect of the strike forced UAC to cave in to their demands.

‘A Call For Revolution’ was first delivered by Agwuna on 27th October 1948 in a public lecture witnessed by about 5,000 people calling for boycotts and non-violence disobedience but there were no ‘Actions’ after it. However, it was delivered again on 7th November 1948 with Abdallah declaring that:

This is an important day indeed - the most important perhaps, in the history of our country. I call it the most important because it is today that we have to decide whether we are to be free or remain hereditary bondsmen who know not that they who must be free must themselves strike the blow. We have passed the age of petition. We have passed the age of resolution. We have passed the age of diplomacy. This is the age of action, plain, blunt and positive action.⁵⁵

The second call for ‘go-slow strike progressing into mass demonstrations and political sabotage’ was answered successfully particularly in the Eastern part of the country. Despite several foreign businessmen in Onitsha who attempted to bypass the strike, it was extremely successful, crippling the entire city. twenty-one youths were arrested as a result of the boycott in Onitsha.⁵⁶ These continual confrontations with the colonialists encouraged the Zikist Movement to begin to consider armed confrontation by gradually storing weapons to engage the colonialists, though never eventually go into armed struggle to gain independence. This action was to lead to the end of the Movement.

⁵³ *West African Pilot*, 9 December 1947; For extensive discussion on the size and influence of NNFL, See, Iweriebor, *Radical Politics... ‘Introduction’*

⁵⁴ See "Wage Increases for I.J.A.C. Staffs," *West African Review*, July 1949, p.787

⁵⁵ *West African Pilot*, 27th November 1948

⁵⁶ Some foreigners in Onitsha tried to do normal business, but the protesters harassed and scared them away. Other places where the demonstration took place were Asaba, Oba, Ogidi, Ogbunike, IJnuanya, Nnewi, Obosi, Abatete, Orafite, Nsugbe and Nkpor. *West African Pilot*, 23rd November 1948.

The Zikists also recognised the importance of religion among Nigerian people. The Zikists used the National Church which broke away from the Anglican Communion to propagate their ideas to the people. The church preached against imperialism demanding for Nigerian independence. The church which was later described as the religious arm of the Zikist Movement had a creed which stated that: "...I believe in Zik's philosophical freedom from want and oppression, the communion of the NCNC and the Zikist Movement from Alien Domination. Liberty Everlasting".⁵⁷ The National Church that regarded as the religious arm of the Zikists, portrayed Zikist Movement as a divine organisation which further endeared them to the heart of Nigerians. The last major activity of the Zikists before their ban was their role in the aftermath of the Iva Valley Massacre of 8th November 1949 also referred to as Enugu Shooting Incidence. Miners numbering over 1,500 in Enugu mining camp went on strike in demand for better conditions of service and higher pay for the hewers. Fearing that they might enter the magazine to use explosives in a manner dangerous to the public, the colonial government decided to remove the explosives.⁵⁸ In the process, fracas ensued between the miners and the colonialists and Officer F.S. Philip ordered his armed men to open fire on the miners with twenty-one strikers dead and fifty-one injured. The Zikist Movement capitalised on this tragic incidence to organise more demonstration in Enugu, Onitsha, Aba, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Owerri, Awka and Umuahia with further destruction of colonial government symbols.⁵⁹ Although the Commission of Enquiry declared that the Movement had no hand in instigating the miners, but it condemned the Zikists for escalating the incidence into general protests throughout the country.⁶⁰

DEMISE OF THE ZIKIST MOVEMENT

Since the Fitzgerald Report on the Enugu Shooting Incidence, the colonial government increased its monitoring of the Zikist Movement and were looking any incriminating evidence to eradicate the group. In late 1949, the Movement decided to be more aggressive by use of fire arms against the colonialists. But in a swift reaction, the government of Macpherson searched the houses and offices of the members and arrested the leading members of the group. They were charged with attempted assassination of Hugh Foot, the Chief Secretary, possession of firearms and seditious document.⁶¹ This document, titled 'The National Programme' written with codes contains:

In this hour of National peril, we shall carry our reprisals bordering on the assassination of British Officers, viz. The Commissioners, Residents, the

⁵⁷ CO 537/4727: Nigeria Political Summary, January - March 1949.

⁵⁸ E.M. Gbenenye, Political Unrest... p. 71

⁵⁹ G.O. Olusanya, The Second World... pp. 118 - 121

⁶⁰ E.E.G. Iweriebor, Radical Politics... p. 229

⁶¹ CO 583/392/13: Governor Macpherson to Secretary of State

Governor, the Chief Secretary to the Government and so on. We shall endeavour to destroy oil storage centres, essential Government houses, Government Departments, and so on.⁶²

The codes of the document include 'no – one' meaning 'the document itself', 'Crust John' meaning the 'National Command, comprising of Zikist Movement, NNFL and UNAMAG', and 'Zakari' means 'execute the plan'.⁶³ The trial of the Zikists started from December 1948 and lasted till March 1949. There were three sedition trials involving the Zikists - the Tom Jones Hall trials involving Agwuna, Enahoro, Aniedobe, and Dafe, the African Echo trials involving Ebi and Odufuwa and the Glover Memorial Hall Trials involving Abdallah, Agwuna, Anyiam, and Macaulay,⁶⁴ Healas Chukwuma Ugokwe and Mokwugo Okoye. Ugokwe was convicted of attempting to assassinate Hugh and sentenced to life imprisonment but was later reduced to twelve years imprisonment after appeal. While Okoye was convicted for issuing the instruction to kill Hugh and was sentenced to 33 months imprisonment.⁶⁵ Other arrested leaders of the were giving varying sentences from six months to a fine of £25.⁶⁶ In total sixteen Zikists: eleven from the North, three from the East, Okoye and Ugokwe were tried by the colonialists.⁶⁷

To finally crush the Movement Governor Macpherson issued a Government Gazette, No 21, Vol. 37, dated 13th April, 1950 and titled 'UNLAWFUL SOCIETY (Zikist Movement)', which declared that:

Conclusive evidence has been obtained from many parts of the country that the Zikist Movement is an organisation which aims to stir up hatred and malice and to pursue seditious aims by lawlessness and violence... Although the Movement, is small and unrepresentative its purposes and methods are dangerous to the good government of Nigeria and it is essential to make it quite clear that such purposes and methods will not be tolerated. The Governor in Executive Council has therefore declared the Movement an unlawful society under section G2 of the Criminal Code. Lagos, 12th April 1950. WHEREAS by an Order in Council dated the 12th day of April 1950, and shortly entitled the Declaration of an Unlawful Society (Zikist Movement) Order in Council, 1950, a society commonly known as

⁶² CO 537/5808: 'The National Programme'; and CO 537/4727: Nigeria political summary on tensions in the Zikist movement and increasing influence of NYM, May 1949, PRO

⁶³ CO 537/5801: 'The National Programme'

⁶⁴ CO 537/3694: 'Political Summary of Jigeria, 1950', PRO, London

⁶⁵ CO 537/1717: Note on Zikists

⁶⁶ CO 537/1717: Note on Zikists

⁶⁷ CO 537/ 5801: Note on Zikists; See also, CO 537/7171: 'The Zikist Movement, 1949', London

the Zikist Movement is declared to be an unlawful society for the purposes of Chapter IX of the Criminal Code (Cap. 42).⁶⁸

As the primary leaders of the Movement were in prisons, the secondary leaders were unable to carry on the work of 'Positive Action'. And because "the insignia, banners, arms, books, papers, documents and other similar property" of the Zikists were confiscated by the colonialist left them with little to build on.⁶⁹ After their prison terms feeling betrayed and demoralised, some of them were absorb into the civil service. Some attempted to gather under a different platform but failed. And in continuity of his unprincipled nature, Nnamdi Azikiwe absorb some of the Zikists he earlier regarded as irresponsible like Eze and Balogun to work for him in NCNC.⁷⁰

With imprisonment and death sentences looming on the heads of the Zikists, their contemptuous defiance towards the British colonialists showed they were ready to be martyrs of the nationalist struggle of Nigeria. For instance, during their trials, Abdallah reiterated his antagonism to colonialism:

My country has for over half a century been panting under the oppressing heels of British imperialism... The potential wealth of our fatherland is being drained steadily and relentlessly while we are assigned to an inferior status in what they hypocritically call a common wealth of families... And we are supposed to keep quiet as if we do not know that in South Africa, the dignity of man has sunken down the abysmal well of degradation... I should have preferred to plead guilty, but I find it difficult to reconcile such plea with the dictates of my conscience". You are here at the instance of that oppressor to punish any such violation of the law... Were I to be set free today, I cannot give you assurance of muzzling my tongue and since I must speak and those laws which brought me here today still exist, what guarantee have I that I may not commit worse crime tomorrow?... I have committed no worse offence than Ireland has been guilty of. And you have found me guilty of fighting for freedom.⁷¹

In a similar fashion, Okoye responded to his accusation in court by saying: "With these immense resources and the coercive state machinery behind you and the government you represent, I do not as a Zikist recognise the right of this court to try this case... You are a symbol of that imperialist

⁶⁸ CO 537/5801: Nigeria Gazette

⁶⁹ CO 537/5801: Nigeria Gazette

⁷⁰ FCO 141/13413: Secret Telegram, Kirby Green to Director General

⁷¹ Cited in A. Suberu and E.P. *Habib, Habib Raji Abdallah...*pp. 246 - 248

machine which I and my colleagues abhor; therefore, I am not pleading before this court".⁷² Their defiance further earn them respect and admiration among Nigerian people.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ZIKISTS

But for some significant challenges, the Zikist could have achieved more resounding success. With the instant popularity of the group, which the founding member did not expect, their lack of organisational skills was exposed. They showed more youthful exuberance than discipline. Olusanya also observes that "lack of co-ordination between the headquarters and the various branches throughout the country, partly because of poor communications, with the result that their activities were ill-planned and poorly executed".⁷³ They also showed poor strategy by going to the street ill-equipped. As such this lack of proper planning and execution led to sporadic 'Positive Action' which made them vulnerable to successful attacks from the more coordinated colonial Police Force.

Internal dispute among the Zikists made their efforts less successful.⁷⁴ With Nduka Eze, a prominent trade unionist and Mokwugo Okoye, an ex-serviceman as founding members of the Movement, one would expect that getting the full support of the ex-servicemen and the trade unions who on their own were eager for change would be a foregone conclusion, but the members could not achieve that, which is an evidence of their lack of tact. It would have benefitted their purpose better if they had first won over the support of the ex-servicemen, trade unions, and other militant organisations before confronting the British colonialists.

In addition, the Movement suffered from inadequate funding. The colonial Governor opined that their central funds do not amount to more than £20.⁷⁵ This affected the steady running of the programmes of the Movement. The Zikist Movement never sort out for financial assistance as they relied solely on the self-sacrifice of the members. Azikiwe whom they saw as their patron refused to give them financial assistance as he could not spend his personal or NCNC money on a 'group of cantankerous followers'.⁷⁶ As expected members of the group "were persecuted, hounded out of jobs and homes. Yet they struggled on, unmindful of poverty, the jeers of onlookers, the pleadings of friends and relatives, and the scorn of Nigerian political leaders"⁷⁷

⁷² Cited in J.S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background... p. 301

⁷³ G.O. Olusanya, The Zikist Movement... p. 328: This was noted by the Governor in CO 537/5801: 'The Zikist Movement'

⁷⁴ See, CO 537/5801: 'The Zikist Movement'

⁷⁵ CO 537/5801: 'The Zikist Movement'

⁷⁶ E.M. Gbenenye, Political Unrest... p. 70

⁷⁷ G.O. Olusanya, The Zikist Movement... p. 330

especially Zik. For instance, Raji Abdallah was dismissed from his job at Radio Rediffusion Services, Kano because of the ‘Sedition lecture’ he delivered in August 1947.⁷⁸ Adesanya Idowu was dismissed by the same department and subsequently persecuted by his home Native Authority at the instigation of the colonial administration. B. G. Ogbuagu, the Jos President of the Movement, had his paper-*Northern Advocate*-fined out of existence.⁷⁹ Again, the members who were convicted during their trial would have made more if they had accepted to fight colonialism from the prison yard, but they chose to pay a fine to keep their freedom. After the arrest of the prominent leaders of the Zikist Movement, it became apparent that the secondary leaders were not ready to make the needed sacrifice and action to sustain the objectives of the Movement.

SUCSESSES AND LEGACY OF THE ZIKISTS

Despite these weaknesses, the Movement achieved some remarkable success towards Nigeria’s road to independence. At a time when Nigerian people afraid to confront the colonialists coupled with the inactive of the National Congress of Nigerians and the Cameroons, the Zikist Movement bravely filled the political gap to reawaken the pressure on the British. They contributed in a substantial way to political awakening in the country, particularly amongst young people. For instance, by collaborating with the Northern Elements Progressive Association, in Kano under the dynamic leadership of Raji Abdallah, the Zikists were able to stimulate nationalist feeling in the North, which was not present before the formation of the Zikist Movement. Olusanya further asserts that “the 1951 constitution was more a result of the activities of the Zikists than anything else. After all, the N.C.N.C. had protested the Richards Constitution in vain and had given up. It was partly to stem the political radicalism set in motion by the Zikists that led Britain to change her views and bring out a new constitution in 1951 before the time-limit set for the operation of the Richards Constitution.⁸⁰ In addition, the role played by the Movement during the Iva Valley shooting incident helped to expose the evil perpetrated by the colonialist and stir up revolt from Nigerians. Even though the Fitzgerald report did not find any evidence to incriminate them in the incidence, it still found them responsible for the disorder that happened after the incidence. This is a testament to their influence all over Nigeria.

Although Nnamdi Azikiwe had some element of Marxism in his propaganda, it was the Zikists who were responsible for disseminating socialist ideas among Nigerians, in effect, laying the foundation of Nigerian socialist thoughts. Furthermore, Ubaku, et al concludes that “the consequences associated with the activities of the Zikists made it possible for Nigeria to escape

⁷⁸ The ‘sedition lecture’ was the first public lecture of the Movement. The lecture was the major evidence used in court against Abdallah, Enahoro, Macaulay and Anyiam in November 1948.

⁷⁹ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 330

⁸⁰ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 333

from apartheid syndrome or racial discrimination".⁸¹ With their reaction against the racial discrimination against the Ivor Cummings at Bristol Hotel, the Governor officially ended discrimination in Nigeria. On the relationship between labour unions and the nationalist organisations, the Zikist unified the effort of both movements to exert more pressure on the British. Prior to the formation of the Zikist Movement, Labour unions and nationalists were isolated from each other, but with the collaboration of NNLF and Zikist Movement, strikes and boycotts became wider spread, better coordinated and effective.

Another success that can be linked to the pressure from the Movement was the gradual 'Nigerianisation' of the civil service. In 1939, there were only 33 Nigerians in the senior cadre of the service, but by 1953, it had rose significantly to 786.⁸² And Britain began to include more Nigerians in the subsequent constitutional process. The legacy of the Zikist Movement went beyond the Nigerian shores as the 'Positive Action' used by the group was adopted by Kwame Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party (CPP) to conquer the British in Gold Coast (now Ghana). One of the most remarkable and daring action taken by the Zikist Movement was to declare themselves independent citizen. On behalf of others, Raji Abdallah in said:

I want to make the following declaration: this seventh day of November 1948, I, Habib Raji Abdallah, by the grace of God, President-General of the Zikist Movement and Field Secretary of the NCNC declare myself a free and independent citizen of Nigeria.⁸³

This was a direct and open challenge to the British government. And from that day, the Positive Actions of the Zikists became more aggressive towards the British. No other nationalist organisation challenged Britain in Nigeria as much as the Zikist Movement did. The organisation changed the tactics of Nigerian nationalism as prior to its formation, nationalism in Nigeria was limited to the pages of Newspapers, journals and pamphlets but the Zikist Movement introduction of violence and aggression to it unsettled the British.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to examine the impacts of the Zikist Movement in the later stage of Nigeria's road to independence. It also explains the ideology introduced by Nnamdi Azikiwe

⁸¹ Ubaku, Kelechi C., Emeh, Chikezie A and Anyikwa, Chinenye N., Impact of Nationalist Movement on the Actualisation of Nigerian Independence, 1914 – 1960, International Journal of History and Philosophical Research, Vol. 2, No. 1, (March 2014), p. 63

⁸² E.E.G. Iweriebor, Radical Politics... pp. 237 - 240

⁸³ *West African Pilot*, 27th November 1948

which inspired the members of this Movement to adopt the non-violence civil disobedience of colonialists, Satyagraha as implemented in India by Mahatma Gandhi but later became very belligerent. In the chapter one, emphasis is placed on the efforts of the early Nigerian nationalism and the concept of nationalism is elucidated. A brief account of the life and time and the true nature of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the most prominent nationalist in Nigeria after the Second World War is presented. But between 1945 and 1950 when the Zikists reigned, Zik and other nationalists were virtually inactive, the Zikist Movement filled a decisive political gap in the history of the country, which prevented apartheid in Nigeria and granted Nigeria an early independence.

The Zikists sustained the struggle at a time when other nationalists had left the field owing to disappointment; and the strike, protest, boycott movement which they started helped to stimulate a new pride in Nigerian freedom and culture. They came into existence at a time when the nationalist movement was badly disorganised, and its other leaders had left the battle out of frustration. Thus, they provided the necessary leadership for the bewildered masses who had been roused to political awareness by World War II and Zik's political propaganda.⁸⁴ While Nigerian leaders were inactive and some collaborating with British, this group of young Nigerians mostly in their twenties from all over Nigeria took on the British and influenced the decisions of Britain on her hold on Nigeria. The Zikist Movement spear-headed the campaign to cripple the colonial government. Slogans such as "Down with Imperialism", "Away with Richards Constitution", "Nigeria first Britain last all the time" were popularized by the movement. Car stickers with bold inscriptions "self-government for Nigeria now" were also pasted on most vehicles.⁸⁵

It is a period Nigerians can look back on and be proud of. The Zikists demonstrated the noble ideal of self-sacrifice in the nation's cause. They were thereby the only true nationalists Nigeria. The few literatures which recognises the Zikists associates them with the National Congress of Nigerians and the Cameroons or basically to protect the life of their patron, Nnamdi Azikiwe. But this research through primary sources at the National Archive in Richmond, London has been able re-evaluate the nationalist history of Nigeria and reposition the contribution of the Zikist Movement on Nigerian nationalism. Dr. Segal, one of the members of the British Parliamentary delegate that visited Nigeria in 1946 and met with the Zikists affirmed that "What struck me most was how well they (the Zikists) might have represented the Youth Movement of almost any country today with their zeal and earnestness and burning passion to set the world aright".⁸⁶

⁸⁴ G.O. Olusanya, *The Zikist Movement...* p. 333

⁸⁵ E.M. Gbenenye, *Political Unrest...* p. 67

⁸⁶ S. Segal, M.P., "West African Impressions: A Report on the Parliamentary Delegation which visited the West African Colonies early this year," *West African Review* (May 1947), pp.544-46.

One question that requires answers is ‘who really contributed the most to Nigerian independence’? With the available primary facts, it is not Nnamdi Azikiwe as erroneously argued before. Azikiwe in 1949 was presented a fifteen-year Dominion Status to independence,⁸⁷ which means independence for Nigeria in 1964 but Nigeria got her freedom in 1960. Zik advocated for revolution in Africa but when the ‘soldiers’ (the Zikists) turned up, he became “intuitively cleverer” than them. He was cowardly, cunning, and deceitful. From 1950, Zik and other leaders Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello etc showed their opportunistic characters as they began to cooperate or ‘collaborate’ with the colonists taking credit for the efforts of the Zikists, which Zik denounced. It is on record that only very few people were imprisoned for the sake of nationalistic struggle in Nigeria. Except for Anthony Enahoro, all others jailed were Zikists. The Zikist Movement was the only organisation banned by Britain in Nigeria during the colonial era. This is because the colonialists feared them. Britain never felt threatened by any other organisation except the Zikist Movement. Before the Zikist Movement, Nigerian nationalist struggle was limited to the pages of Newspapers, journals and pamphlets, and very little was achieved with these. The Zikists changed the face of Nigerian nationalism with their ‘Positive Action’. The Zikists got independence for Nigeria.

Nigeria is generally governed by ‘elders’ even at local level without the youths given opportunity to lead. The Zikist Movement is a practical example of the efficiency and effectiveness of youths over our saturated elders. The Nigerian elders should and must give the youths the opportunity to govern Nigeria. The constitution of Nigeria still states that people below the age of forty cannot vie for national executive and legislative posts. This must be changed to reflect the modern composition of Nigeria. According to the Nigerian census statistics, more sixty percent of Nigerian population is less than forty years of age. Therefore, Nigerian youths, just like the Zikists, should aggressively demand for the authority and power to govern Nigeria.

While the Nigerian political leaders were and are still busy fanning the flames of tribalism, nepotism, religious differences, mediocrity, and disunity, the Zikists unified the country based on meritocracy and desire for self-reliance. The Zikist Movement was the first and only Nigerian nationalist organisation with a real national clout having branches in every part of Nigeria and a pragmatic reflection of the ethnic and regional realities of the country. The Zikist Movement, inspired by an Easterner (Nnamdi Azikiwe), founded by a Westerner (Kola Balogun) and led by a Northerner (Raji Abdallah), and followed at every nook and cranny of Nigeria, is basically the greatest and arguably the truest nationalist movement in Nigerian colonial history.

⁸⁷ KV 1818: ‘Nigeria Near Breaking Point’, *Daily Telegraph*, 30th December 1949

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