

Book Review

Union Education in Nigeria: Labor, Empire, and Decolonization since 1945

Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani
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Union Education in Nigeria: Labor, Empire, and Decolonization since 1945 has a clear purpose from its outset. Its author, Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, provides both new information and a hitherto unutilized perspective of analysis regarding union education in Nigeria as Nigeria approached independence, transitioned into it, and progressed. Tijani manages to accomplish the aforementioned goals because in 2006, Great Britain's Foreign Office and Colonial Office both declassified documents that validated previous assertions regarding measures to inhibit and wholly remove leftist inroads and inclinations in Nigeria. The combination of this new information, an effort to include and to show the relevance of Nigeria's leftist intelligentsia, and the application of a postcolonial lens to this historical timeline thus satisfies a noticeable void in the historical analysis of union education in Cold War era Nigeria.

Tijani is successful in his aspiration as the ensuing book provides a compelling account of the impetus and growth behind union education in Nigeria. This is achieved by establishing the relationship among the leftist intelligentsia, the colonial government, and the British government. Tijani details the aims of all three groups regarding their ideologies and how each sought to use union education as a vector from which to further its goals while suppressing opposing ideological views. What is more, all of the resulting effects were magnified due to the pressure created by the Cold War and Nigeria's forthcoming independence from Great Britain.

Tijani develops his perspective by structuring this book so that it emphasizes the rationale and positioning of the Right and the Left while providing detail on critical events during relevant periods. Chapter 1 serves mostly to lay the foundation for later chapters; however, it also expresses the state of Communism within Nigeria in 1945. Chapter 1 is also important as it establishes a motif within the book, the British government's desire to have union members educated and informed about the importance of "sound industrial relations" (p. 8). This motif is important as it represents Great Britain's own ideological proclivity and a concerted effort to prevent the spread of Communism and the disruption of industry within Nigeria.

Chapters 2 and 3 establish the context and impetus behind the motivation for action regarding the decolonization of Nigeria from the Left and the Right, respectively. Chapter 2 details the considerable influence of leftist ideology in Nigeria from the 1920s onward. There was a shift in its public acceptability as post-World War II Nigeria became a significant arena in the battle for the hearts and minds of its inhabitants as Communism emerged as a nascent threat. As a result of this new threat and the increasing popularity of leftist ideology in Nigeria's

environment of radical nationalism, anti-leftist measures proliferated as Britain sought to maintain its timeline for Nigerian decolonization. Chapter 3 picks up at this point and posits that Britain's agreement to Nigerian decolonization was not merely a result of the success of Nigerian nationalists. There was also rising pan-African identification, plummeting international favour regarding colonialism, and Great Britain's desire to foster and sustain a "special relationship" (p. 31) with the former colony, which would maintain capital flow and resource exploitation.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the actions taken by the colonial government to remedy the problem of Nigerian Communism. The colonial government used three practices to combat the threat: training labour and industrial officers; promoting the International Confederation of Trade Unions while denigrating the World Federation of Trade Unions, pro-Right and pro-Left respectively; and encouraging a pro-western labour congress. Furthermore, the government began to use education in a proactive way to combat leftist leanings. This was done by awarding scholarships for students to study in western countries and through the use of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University College in Ibadan to train future labour officers and unionists in a manner fitting the goals of the colonial government.

Chapter 5 provides a more detailed account of the pre-emptive use of union education within Nigeria by the colonial government to prevent further growth in leftist popularity and to inculcate labour leaders and workers with the knowledge and dispositions to ensure "sound industrial relations" (p. 8). Tijani works toward this understanding by providing examples of how education was an effective means through which Communism within Nigeria was both prevented and denigrated. This effectiveness was compounded as, through this education, employers and the government gained workers that had been influenced by rightist ideology and were thus likely to further disseminate it. Through this effort, the colonial government developed an environment of industry that opposed Communism and facilitated decolonization. In the process, there would be minimal risk to existing capitalist ventures or the emerging special relationship between Great Britain and Nigeria.

Chapter 6 continues to share anti-leftist measures taken in Nigeria but through a personal lens. Tijani focuses on several activists of the working class to provide a Marxist view of colonial government policies and labour education. As a result of being marginalized, many leftists began forming Marxist organizations during the 1950s. These organizations pressured the colonial government as they sought to wrestle control away from Great Britain and implement Communism within Nigeria. To do so, leftists disseminated Marxist thought, shared Marxist ideas in unions and organizations, and strove to make people active. Despite the number of groups working toward a related end, Tijani noted that the leftist intelligentsia failed to achieve their goal of a socialist Nigeria due to pervasive internal conflict within groups and the consistent anti-leftist measures taken by the government and foreign industry.

In Chapter 7, Tijani discusses the Nigerian Union of Seamen Dispute of 1959, a noteworthy event as it concretized the successes and failures of previous decades of labour union education in Nigeria while Nigeria was on the verge of gaining independence. The strike occurred aboard a freight vessel en route from Lagos to Liverpool, United Kingdom, and was precipitated by steadily degenerating relations between the Nigerian Seamen's Union and Elder Dempster Lines Limited. Previously there had been two major attempts to ameliorate this relationship, however, both failed at a practical level and exacerbated tensions between the two parties. This context, combined with the Seamen's Union being under the leadership of Wari Orumbie, a reputed leftist, was believed to have created the conditions for a walkout. This walkout became especially

troubling for the colonial government due to the embarrassment (and threat to Great Britain's desired special relationship) of an accusation that an extant colour-bar within Elder Dempster Lines Limited was responsible for the ensuing strife. As a result of this strike, the education of seamen and their labour leaders regarding industrial imperatives and rightist values, previously not a priority of the Seamen's Union, was deemed essential for recreating an amicable atmosphere in the shipping industry and preventing workers from taking such actions in the future.

Chapter 8 is an epilogue of sorts. It attempts to convey the continuity between pre- and post-independence Nigeria and at the same time note the difference between the two eras. The Right and the Left continued to provide labour education and tried to maintain the pre-existing balance of power and influence between them. As it was before, the Right used powerful support and inculcation coupled with anti-leftist measures while the Left was beset with internal struggle. Further tension became evident during the general strike of 1964, which illuminated that "sound industrial relations" (p. 8) had not been achieved. The Civil War era of 1967 to 1970 resulted in a period of stagnation in labour union education. Though, once this period came to a close, the training of workers began to be seen as paramount to the healing of post-war Nigeria. Furthermore, an emphasis on credentialing and structured instruction given by recognized institutions became paramount as union education became inextricably linked with the qualities of human capital theory, the belief that each individual is capable of producing economic value and that this value is determined by various competencies and attributes, such as one's education. As such, the post-colonial government established the Nigeria Labour Congress to provide benchmarks and programs in the area, which still to this day is ensnared in ideological conflict with the leftist labour education body of the United Labour Congress.

While this book generally reads well, there are certain aspects of its structure that are cumbersome. One that is readily apparent is the formatting of the chapters as discrete sections with their own demarcations created by various headings including *Introduction* and *Conclusion*. This feature, coupled with the brevity of most chapters, leaves each chapter feeling like a journal article. The result is that the book itself reads as a collection of related articles rather than a singular work.

Regarding the ease of reading, there is a consistent repetition of large portions of text, ranging from one sentence to nearly half a page. While not always repeated verbatim (though they often are), texts are noticeably similar. This repetition is often done between the chapter overview section of Chapter 1, subsequent chapter introductions, and various sections of almost every chapter. While this may not necessarily qualify as a flaw, it initially causes confusion and leaves the impression that this text was hastily prepared.

Superficial composition flaws aside, there are also certain aspects of the content of this book with which I take issue. One that builds over the course of the book is an undertone of bias toward the left and the leftist intelligentsia. Though this book does well in adequately portraying the struggles and intent of both the Left and the Right, the overall tone of the book and certain diction choices imply that, despite consistent internal conflict, Tijani views and portrays the Left as a protagonist and its repeated defeat is the preeminent result of an overwhelming cabal of the Right. An example of such is Tijani's reference to various important men of leftist ideology in Nigeria as "Champions" and "Noble Men" (p. 73). In contrast, the Right is provided with phrasing imbued with negative connotation such as the depiction of it as creating "foot soldiers" through education (p. 65). Furthermore, Tijani designates important victories such as the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria's 1959 unanimous support of the ten goals of labour union education

in Nigeria as pro-western yet he does not elaborate on how they are so.

Another aspect that detracts from the overall value of this book is Tijani's omission of motives and analysis regarding private industry and capitalism. This omission is maintained despite the establishment of the blatant motif of "sound industrial relations" (p. 8) and a passing mention early in the book of the tangible benefits garnered from the development policies of the colonial government and the work of foreign industry. Such an omission invites one to infer that those on the Right are villains whose actions are motivated by a fear of Communism and a desire to maintain unidirectional capital flow out of Nigeria.

Despite these flaws, Tijani has made a significant contribution with this book, *Union Education in Nigeria: Labor, Empire, and Decolonization since 1945*, through his incorporation of unused documentation from Nigeria's colonial era and his elaboration of workers' education as a significant vector for smooth and purposive decolonization. Through this book, Tijani provides a worthwhile case study of union education in Nigeria and its use as a tool during the protean political landscape of post-WWII Nigeria. Furthermore, he thoughtfully illuminates the pressure exerted on Nigeria as it was encompassed by the British and western sphere of influence during part of the Cold War era. I recommend this book to anyone interested in a case study of adult education as an influential political vector; an example and explanation for growth in demand, provision, and standardization of union education; the political vicissitude of Nigeria during this timeframe; or anyone interested in understanding the tumultuous development of Nigeria's union education.

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