# POWER POLITICS, EMERGENCY RULE IN THE WESTERN REGION AND THE FALL OF NIGERIA'S FIRST REPUBLIC

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***Abstract***

*This paper is an attempt to explore the historical relationship that unite the way politics was played in Nigeria's First Republic, emergency rule in the Western Region and the eventual collapse of Nigeria's first civilian government. It covers a vital time in Nigerian history between 1960 and 1966. Nigeria attained independence from Britain in October 1 1960. By January 15 1966, the military intervened in a military coup d'état essentially due to the fact that Nigerian politicians refused to play by the rules. The attitude of winning at all costs undermined the finest ethos of democracy, breached the federal system and turned politics into undeclared but open war. A coalition of these political abnormalities had produced the forces that made emergency rule in the Western Region an attractive option. That proved quite disruptive for a system meant to run on rules. The emergency was expected to help address the crisis in the Western Region. However, it multiplied the crisis and produced forces that pulled down the system. It is a part of the work's conclusion is that the recourse to foul means by politicians played a part in the incursion of the military into Nigerian politics and the challenges currently confronting Nigeria.*

*Keywords: Politics, Nigeria, First Republic, Federalism, Western Region, State of Emergency*

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's First Republic lasted from 1 October 1960 to 15 January 1966, when Nigeria's experiment in parliamentary democracy was shot down in a bloody military coup d'état. The Nigerian political system endured a lot of

avoidable occurrences during those years. They continue to affect her history negatively. One of these issues that continue to drag Nigeria down in her efforts to advance has to do with federalism and power configuration within the Nigerian state. It also has a relationship with how politicians exercised power. These issues have their roots in the history of the shenanigans of the First Republic. One of the greatest manifestations of the pranks of the era took place in the Western Region when the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.) coalition de-clared a state of emergency that overthrew the government controlled by the opposition Action Group on 29 May 1962. On that fateful day, the Nigerian House of Representatives approved a set of regulations that declared a state of emergency over the Western Region. The motion for that was moved by the Federal Prime, Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa of the N.P.C. and seconded by the Federal Finance Minister, Festus Okotie-Eboh of the N.C.N.C. The motion was passed by a vote of 232 to 44.[1]

On face value, the party affiliations of the mover and supporter of the motion may not prove anything. However, within the context of Nigerian politics of the era it meant quite a lot. It is instructive to note that the N.P.C. and the N.C.N.C. formed the ruling coalition at the federal level. On the other hand, the victim of the regulations was the A.G., the opposition party at the federal level and a perceived enemy. Among other things, the regulations suspended the western Governor, Premier, Speaker of the House and regional ministers.[2] This paper examines the consequences of the emergency regulations within the contexts of federalism; the struggle for political power, the craving for undue advantages over political opponents cast in the mould of enemies and the attendant recourse to foul means. It contends that the Western crisis presented the N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. federal coalition with an opportunity to destabilize the A.G. and gain a stronger foothold in the region. One of the consequences has been a

Nigerian political system constructed around breaking rules for gains irrespective of the cost to the Nigerian state. The work presents a background to the crisis; examines the facts against the pretensions and reveals a cankerworm of political intrigues by a self-serving elite class interested in making the rule of law and decency victims of their crude lust for raw power. It establishes a linkage between the dangerous way politics was played and the fall of the First Republic. The work also reveals how the emergency regulations produced contradictions that undermined Nigeria's democratic institutions to the extent that they virtually exist only in name today.

## BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCY RULE IN THE WESTERN REGION

The politics of Nigeria's First Republic was characterized by the bitter struggle for power amongst the three main parties. One of the challenges Nigeria faced was that prior to political independence from the British on 1 October 1960, the three major political parties had mapped out areas of the country as home bases. While the North and East were solidly controlled by the N.P.C. and N.C.N.C. respectively, the situation in the Western Region was slightly different. The A.G. had to contend with a formidable N.C.N.C. opposition in the Western House. In 1962, there was a rift within the ranks of the A.G. over some differences between the National Leader of the party, Obafemi Awolowo and his deputy, S.L.A. Akintola. The N.C.N.C.'s yearning for power in the West and the A.G.'s carelessness in tackling the affairs of the region and the party produced series of crises from which federalism and representative government emerged major victims.

An essential feature of party politics is the pursuit of political power, which is not bad in itself. Taken too far, however, as happened in Nigeria between 1960 and 1965, it could prove quite destructive. A situation in which

political parties proclaimed regions under their control as 'no go' areas for other political parties was antithetical to politics and eventually proved injurious to Nigerian politics. Campaign for support by political parties ought not to be subject to regional boundaries in a federation. The opposite was, however, the case in Nigeria's First Republic, judging by the hostility exhibited by certain politicians towards others they considered infiltrators in 'their' regions. Unofficial measures aimed at curtailing opponents' advance in the struggle for power led to bitter feelings. For instance, the AG's efforts to improve her electoral fortunes in the Northern Region (under the NPC and its leader, the Sardauna of Sokoto who was also the Northern Premier) were met with undisguised hostility. According to K.W. Post 'It is doubtful if the Sardauna of Sokoto ever forgave the AG for the onslaught it launched on his northern 'fief' in the 1959 election'.3 Such a scenario was unhelpful to healthy political competition. It simply poisoned the political scene.

Another major challenge that confronted the politics of Nigeria's First Republic was that some top politicians saw federalism as a makeshift to the desired unitary form of government. In 1960, the N.C.N.C. Premier of the Eastern Region, Michael Okpara, had declared:"It is better to have a united country with a federal system of government than to disintegrate. We as a party have not found favour with the federal system of government. We prefer the unitary system, where the little tribalist will be eliminated."[4]

Okpara was not alone in advocating a unitary structure of government for Nigeria. While delivering a lecture in 1962, the Federal Prime Minister, Tafawa-Balewa also expressed the hope that the federal system should be replaced with a unitary system when he had declared: 'The time may come after understanding one another better without one tribe dominating the other when we can hope for a unitary system of government but not now'.5 The above remarks from two frontline politicians portrayed a readiness to

tolerate federalism as second best. Thus, federalism in Nigeria's First Republic took-off under some disadvantages. Because the system was tolerated, those with this frame of mind did not shy away from undermining the system, and possibly casting it apart. The results manifested in the political crisis Nigeria faced arising from the squabbles in the Western Region. It is against this background that the fortunes of federalism under the power politics witnessed in Nigeria's First Republic with particular emphasis on the Western Region and its consequences for the entire Nigerian scene shall be examined.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL POWER IN THE WESTERN REGION AND THE INTERVENTION BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The decision by the federal government of Nigeria to impose emergency rule on the Western Region in 1962 seems to have been influenced by political considerations and may well represent a high point of the struggle for power among Nigeria's political parties. In moving the motion for the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Region the Prime Minister averred that it was to arrest a situation that threatened Nigeria's democratic institutions.6 There had been some fracas amongst rival members of the Western House of Assembly. This arose from a constitutional crisis that emanated from the regional governor's purported dismissal of the Regional Premier, S.L.A Akintola. The argument of the federal government on the floor of parliament was that she moved in to nip the crisis in the bud and prevent a worse scenario from unfolding. That excuse, however, may have been a smokescreen erected to conceal the truth of what prompted emergency rule in the Western Region. A look at events that preceded and succeeded the emergency motion suggests it was an outcome of intra and inter party tussle for power amongst politicians. Nigeria had entered her era of independence in October 1960 with an

N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. coalition at the federal level. The A.G., which had been part of the pre-1960 federal coalition, had gone into opposition. However, the party was considered hostile for deciding to be in opposition.

This mindset was exhibited by the attitude of the federal coalition partners. Soon after the attainment of independence by Nigeria in 1960, the boast of a leading member of the coalition, the Federal Finance Minister, Festus Okotie-Eboh of the N.C.N.C. about how it was ready to invoke the emergency powers in the constitution led to a major controversy. He had said at the House of Representatives "if anyone thinks his political party is capable of practicing subversive activities we can assure the individual that the federal government will apply the constitution and get rid of that government".7 The statement is important as it shows how the emergency clause of the constitution was relied upon to get rid of an unfriendly government. Nigeria had three regions then and the two federal coalition partners (N.P.C. and N.C.N.C.) controlled the reins of political power in the Northern and Eastern regions respectively. The reference to a political party and a government was to the A.G. and the Western Region. It would have been unthinkable for the coalition partners to 'get rid' of the governments formed by their political parties. Perhaps, realising that the veiled reference was to his party and government, the Deputy Leader of the AG and the Premier of the Western Region, S.L.A. Akintola, issued a statement saying 'All the governments of the federation are co-ordinate and not in any way subordinate to each other.'[8]

Akintola's statement is quite remarkable. He later sang a different tune when a rift occurred within the ranks of his party and he found himself leading a smaller faction and gasping for political survival. The whole question of whether the federal government was constitutionally empowered to get rid of regional governments was only dropped after the

Prime Minister stated that "all governments of the federation are autonomous...none could dissolve the other."[9]

It is important to note that Okotie-Eboh's initial remarks indicated a readiness on the part of the federal government to employ the emergency provisions of the constitution in the struggle for political power. The initial attempt to invoke the emergency provisions of the constitution on the A.G.-controlled government of the Western Region took place in 1961, when the N.C.N.C. called for the suspension of the government of the Western Region due to what it considered 'a threat to law and order' in certain parts of the region.10 The N.C.N.C. opposition leader in the Western House of Assembly, Remi Fani-Kayode, had alleged that the region's government was subordinated to the A.G. machinery and called on the federal government to declare a state of emergency in the region.11 The National Executive Council of the N.C.N.C. supported the call.12 While supporting his party, the National President of the N.C.N.C., Michael Okpara, alleged that the western regional government was employing the region's local government police forces to oppress N.C.N.C. supporters in the Mid-West, Ibadan and Ilesa.[13]

Though the N.C.N.C.'s allegation of partisanship against the western government and the region's local government police forces and subsequent call for a declaration of a state of public emergency appeared to have been ignored by the federal authorities, the call may have been fundamental in the eventual declaration of a state of emergency in the region. The fact that the only non-political office holder suspended by the emergency regulations was the Superintendent-General of the region's local government police forces tends to give a strong accent to the above assertion.[14] If it was a mere coincidence, then it is too powerful to ignore. From the foregoing, it appears that the declaration of a state of public emergency in the Western Region was premeditated. It will appear that the N.C.N.C. exploited an

opportunity offered by the A.G. crisis made a strong bid for power in the region. In doing that, the N.C.N.C. behaved true to type as a political party. The ambition of the N.C.N.C. was to influence the role her western and federal parliamentarians played in the crisis that engulfed the Western Region.

A crack within the A.G. had led to the dismissal of the of the Western Premier, S.L.A. Akintola on 20 May 1966 by the Western Governor, Adesoji Aderemi, acting on a document presented to him by the majority faction of the A.G. Akintola went to court the same day challenging his said dismissal. As the A.G. crisis was weakening the party, the N.C.N.C. was desirous of either forming or being a part of the next government in the region. This explains the role of the Western Region's N.C.N.C. in the regional crisis. As Akintola challenged his dismissal in court, a meeting of the Western House of Assembly was scheduled for 25 May 1962. Perhaps, seeing the factionalisation of the A.G. as its surest bet for acquiring power in the Western Region, the N.C.N.C. threw her weight behind the smaller Akintola faction of the A.G., which must have numbered below twenty in the regional house.[15] The document on which the regional governor acted to remove the governor was allegedly signed by sixty-six (66) A.G. members in a house of one hundred and seventeen (117).[16] The N.C.N.C. western caucus decided to side the Akintola faction in the A.G. crisis after allegedly rejecting a bribe of forty thousand pounds offered by the bigger Awolowo faction of the A.G. to dissuade it from supporting the Akintola faction.[17]

It will appear that for the N.C.N.C. there was nothing to the crises in the A.G. and the Western Region outside its usefulness in getting her nearer the seat of regional power. Twice on 25 May 1962, N.C.N.C. parliamentarians sided with the Akintola faction to disrupt the proceedings of the Western House of Assembly and prevent her from taking a decision on the embattled regional premier on the floor of the House.[18] That same day, the

Federal Prime Minister announced that the Federal House of Representatives would meet on 29 May 1962 on the situation in the Western Region. It met and approved a set of regulations imposing a state of emergency on the region. Amongst other things, the regulations appointed a Regional Administrator answerable only to the Prime Minister. With the regulations also, the constitutional clause guaranteeing democratic elections was suspended.[19] The regulations also suspended the regional offices of the Governor, Premier, Ministers, Speaker of the Western House of Assembly and the Superintendent-General of the Local Government Police Forces. The Administrator was empowered to imprison anyone spreading false information and could prohibit public processions in addition to other wide-ranging powers in the interest of 'public order'.20 It is instructive to note that the Superintendent General of the Western Nigerian Local Government Police forces was the only public servant relieved of his position according to the letters of the emergency regulations. That strikes a chord with Okpara's 1961 allegation that the AG-controlled government of the Western Region was using the local government police forces to intimidate N.C.N.C. supporters in certain parts of the region and his support of Fani-Kayode's call for a state of emergency in the Western Region. It helps to establish the connection between the 1961 call and the 1962 declaration of emergency rule in the region.

## LINKING UP THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY IN THE WESTERN REGION WITH HISTORICAL FACTS

The question of the constitutional propriety of the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Region will continue to be of interest to students of Nigerian political and legal history. An examination of the reasons for which the emergency clause of the Nigerian Independence Constitution was imposed suggests a hastiness informed by political considerations rather

than a wish to see to the survival of democracy. The constitutional procedure for declaring a state of emergency in any part of Nigeria was clearly stated in the constitution. The constitution provided for that when the federation was at war or when the democratic institutions of the country were threatened. All that was required was a resolution of each house of the federal parliament.21 The constitution left federal authorities to decide what constituted a threat to the democratic institutions. Obviously, the federation was not at war. Members of the House of Representatives who spoke for the motion on the floor of the house said its approval was necessary to stem the threat the crisis in the Western Region posed to democratic institutions in Nigeria.[22]

It will appear that the state of public emergency over the Western Region was declared as a means to the political end of doing away with governmental powers in the hands of the rival AG. The build-up to the fateful day particularly suggests that. But it must be accepted that a situation in which legislators empowered to make laws threw decorum to the winds and fought each other in the chamber was dangerous for democracy.23 The graveness of the situation comes out clearly with the realisation that the legislature is not just an arm of government but the major pillar on which the structure of democracy rests. The fracas in the Western House of Assembly represented a threat to law and order, no doubt. However, the argument cannot be stretched beyond that point when it is realised that the need to save the democratic institutions of the country was seized upon to hide a sinister political motive. This political argument that the emergency powers were invoked due to the perceived threats the Western crisis posed to Nigeria's democratic institutions seems incompatible with the fact that one of such institutions - the judiciary - was side-tracked by the hurry involved in invoking the emergency provisions of the constitution to deal with a regional matter. Why was the High Court which the supposedly sacked Western Premier had approached for

adjudication not allowed to make a pronouncement on the matter before the federal government stepped in if there was not more to the emergency rule than the official explanation?

It is difficult to believe that the only way out of the crisis was the elimination of the AG-controlled government of the region. Would the same measure have been deployed if the crisis involved the Eastern or Northern regions? The emergency regulations can be seen as a weapon employed by the federal coalition in their attempt to undo the AG. The opponents of the AG must be seen as having seized upon a crisis within the ranks of the party to smash their way to power and render the AG impotent in the struggle for power both nationally and regionally. While not disagreeing with the constitutional provisions for a declaration of a state of public emergency, the excuses for invoking it can be questioned. The crisis could have been settled in the law court had the federal coalition not been fixated on a definite solution. There are historical evidences in favour of the view that the emergency regulations saga in the Western Region was contrived by the federal coalition to score a cheap political point over the AG. Okotie-Eboh's warning about the willingness of the federal government to invoke the emergency clause of the constitution to 'get rid' of a subversive government needs recalling here. It appears that when a split eventually occurred within the ranks of the AG, the federal coalition enlisted the support of the Akintola faction of the AG for her own political interest. This can help us understand the role of the NCNC as a party in the crisis. This state of affairs can also help us appreciate how an Akintola who had condemned federal intervention in regional affairs in 1961 became converted to the appropriateness of the federal government suspending an elected regional government in 1962. He actually did call on the federal government to act and argued that the region had no effective government.24 By the time Akintola engaged in this amazing political twist in 1962, the Governor of the Western Region had announced his sack as

Western Premier. As Premier, the same Akintola had challenged the powers of the federal government to sack a regional government. His new interpretation was a product of a feeling that emergency rule will help him in the power struggle against his opponents in the larger faction of the AG by denying them the Premiership. After announcing his sack, the Western Regional Governor appointed Dauda Adegbenro of the Awolowo faction to the Premiership of the region.

The scenario in the Western Region created the impression that the federal authorities held the Awolowo faction of the AG in contempt and sided with the Akintola faction to remove the mainstream AG from power in the region, destroyed the party and facilitated Akintola's retention of the premiership irrespective of public opinion. That project has a long history of its own dating back to heady days of mid-October 1960. The Akintola faction of the party was used to accomplish the ambition espoused by Okotie-Eboh using the crisis in the West as a decoy. Whatever doubt existed as to the usefulness of the emergency regulations in the sack of the AG government of the Western Region was wiped-off by developments after the expiration of emergency rule. When emergency rule ended in January 1963, Akintola returned to the Premiership. On his return, he was at the head of a coalition of his newly-formed United People's Party (U.P.P.) and the N.C.N.C. This development enabled the N.C.N.C. realise her long-held ambition of achieving political power in the Western Region. The N.C.N.C.'s former Leader of Opposition in the Western House of Assembly, Remi Fani-Kayode, was appointed Deputy Premier. The AG, which had controlled the reins of political power in the region before emergency rule, was manipulated out of power into opposition. One of the consequences of this new development was that it intensified the political tension the imposition of emergency rule had forced on the region. The catastrophe arising from that was to spread and envelope Nigeria in a dark cloud of uncertainty.

## EMERGENCY RULE IN THE WESTERN REGION AND THE DEEPENING OF THE NIGERIAN CRISIS

The heat generated by the inter-party struggle for supremacy in the First Republic made the Nigerian political environment quite unsettling for sustainable development even without one level of government seizing another. This setting got even worse with emergency rule in the Western Region. Once the emergency rule currents were let loose, they took on lives of their own and resulted in negative multiplier effects that produced crisis after crisis for Nigeria. What started as an attempt by the federal coalition partners to gain a political foothold in a Western Region governed by the rival A.G. spiralled out of control as the federal government chewed more than it could swallow. The determination of the federal government to have its way in the Western crisis produced its own powerful undercurrents that eventually coursed through Nigeria like a cancer. In reply to a July 1962 ruling of the Privy Council in London disagreeing with the Nigerian Supreme Court's decision that the Western House of Assembly exceeded its constitutional authority in removing Akintola as Premier, the reconvened Western House of Assembly amended the region's constitution to invalidate the position of the Privy Council. The retroactive amendment provided that the Premier of the Western Region could not be removed without an adverse vote on the floor of the House. This was later endorsed by the federal parliament, thus effectively side-tracking the Privy Council to which appeals could still be made under Nigerian law. There could be a connection between this development and why Nigeria suddenly attained republican status in October 1963, which put a stop to appeals to the Privy Council from Nigeria.

The above scenario meant a crude overthrow of the A.G. government by the federal coalition and replacement with a coalition favourable to it. It was a terrible exemplification of power politics and federalism in practice. It ultimately weakened the federation of Nigeria. For nearly a decade, some

semblance of political balance had been maintained by the three political parties exercising political power in Nigeria's three regions. It was as though the country stood on three powerful pillars of a house each representing Nigeria's three regions with the federal government acting as the beams and roof of the house. With the fate of the A.G. in the Western Region, one of the pillars was pulled out. The building necessarily had to wobble from imbalance. Avoidable instability followed because Nigeria got into a needless and intractable political storm.

The challenges engendered by the crisis in the Western Region set the stage for a major national crisis. Shortly after settling down on his second coming as Premier of the Western Region, Akintola transformed his U.P.P. into the Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P.) with an ultimatum to N.C.N.C. members in his cabinet to join his party or resign their positions. The N.C.N.C. was weakened and paid horrible price when nine (including the Deputy Premier, Fani-Kayode) of its eleven ministers joined the N.N.D.P. The N.C.N.C. had proved partially successful in employing her federal connection to destroy the A.G. and gain some more powers in the Western Region. However, Akintola's manipulation of the vulnerable position of her western ranking members made the party a giant with clay feet. The party's narrow-minded pursuit of political power and Akintola's political master-stroke sounded her death-knell as a political force in the Western Region. She had gambled for hope and won fear.

Soon after this, the N.C.N.C. fell out with her federal coalition partner over the census controversy of 1963. The coalition partners continued to co-habit for political convenience but the alliance was in fact dead. This soon led to a re-alignment of political forces in Nigeria. Nigeria's first post-independence census results of 1963 were mired in controversy consequent upon the calculations of political parties in the North-South divide. Two census exercises conducted in quick succession became a

major source of quarrel and even litigation between the N.C.N.C. (which became the touch-bearer of the South in the struggle with the North) and the N.P.C. They disagreed over the figures returned in the two exercises. The President of the N.C.N.C. and Premier of the East, Michael Okpara, was particularly vigorous in denouncing the figures that established a wide gulf between the two Southern regions and the North.25 The N.C.N.C. and the A.G. found a common ground for friendship in their disagreement with the N.P.C.. Their friendship led to a major political shift in Nigeria

The re-alignment of political forces in Nigeria brought the A.G. back into a new life and an alliance with the N.C.N.C. This Southern force against the North was informed by the North's realization that it no longer needed the alliance of the N.C.N.C. The N.C.N.C. had gone into alliance with the N.P.C. in 1959. By 1962, the friendship came under serious train as a result of Nigeria's domestic politics and the positions of the parties, regions and sections (North and South). In the ensuing politics of Nigeria's post-independence politics, the struggle became sectional, between North and South. With the imprisonment of A.G. leaders and the caging of the party first by the federal coalition and later the N.P.C. alone, some questions were rendered in very clear terms. The N.P.C. felt that in the N.N.D.P. it had a reliable and subordinate but eager Southern ally with which it could achieve a parliamentary majority after the federal elections proposed for 1964. As a result, it believed it no longer needed the N.C.N.C. On the other hand, the N.C.N.C. felt obligated to sustain the Southern opposition to the N.P.C. with the raw reality of the awful fate of the A.G. and the attendant Yoruba disunity staring it in the face.26 The N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. alliance was pronounced dead in 1964 when the N.P.C. Northern Premier, Ahmadu Bello, announced that the N.P.C. would have no further dealings with the N.C.N.C. because 'the Ibos have never been true friends of the north and never will be'.[27]

The struggle witnessed in the new dispensation was significant in the series of events that led to the fall of the First Republic. The demise of the N.P.C.-N.C.N.C. coalition opened another chapter in political realignments in the country. The N.P.C. and its new Southern ally, the N.N.D.P. formed an alliance that included the Midwest Democratic Front (M.D.F.) and the Niger Delta Congress (M.D.C.). It was named the Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A.). The N.C.N.C., the Northern Elements Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.), the United Middle Belt Congress (U.M.B.C.) and the A.G. formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A). Though there were parties from the North and the South joining U.P.G.A. and N.N.A. respectively, the alliance system was largely along the North-South divide. The new dispensation was the final outcome of the struggle for power that characterized Nigeria's post-independence existence. The ethno-regional pull of Nigerian politics became of prime importance and eventually proved too negative for any positive force to defeat. The sectional struggle involved in the new dispensation is significant in understanding the collapse of Nigeria's First Republic.

Between 1964 and 1966 Nigerian politics will appear to have unearthed a lot of dirt. It became dangerously polarized between North and South. It can be said that the new-found friendship between the A.G. and the N.C.N.C. that resulted in U.P.G.A. was forged in the throes of and Southern identity politics. It was recourse to Southern solidarity against the backdrop of political challenge and perceived impunity flowing down from the North. It is also symptomatic of how a three-dimensional struggle for national mastery and dominance narrowed into a zero-sum titanic North-South struggle. The tension it bred was palpable and dangerous for national stability as no punches were pulled. The build-up to the federal elections billed for December 30, 1964 was marked by many negatives. On dissolving Parliament in readiness for the elections, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's President, warned about the consequences of the unfolding drama.

His concluding remarks that turned out to be prophetic, read in part:"I have one advice to our politicians. If they have decided to destroy our national unity, then they should summon a roundtable conference to decide how our national assets should be shared before they seal their doom by satisfying their lust for office. I make this suggestion because it is better for us ... that we should disintegrate in peace. Should the politicians fail to heed this warning, then I will venture the prediction that the experience of the Democratic Republic of Congo will be a child's play if it ever comes to our part to play such a tragic role."[28]

This warning did not seem to have hit home. In the elections proper, politicians exploited all foul means for undue advantages. The N.N.A. was particularly vicious. It got so bad that U.P.G.A., urged the President to postpone the elections. The President suggested inviting the United Nations to supervise the elections. The N.N.A. Prime Minister rejected it.29 Finally, U.P.G.A. called on its supporters to boycott the elections. The boycott was largely heeded in the East, in the North and West, however, election held largely and the announced results gave massive victories of one hundred and ninety-eight (198) seats to the N.N.A. in both regions. U.P.G.A. got fifty (50) seats. About seventy (70) N.N.A. candidates were returned unopposed in the North. Arising from the controversies over the results, the President vacillated in calling on the 'victorious' N.N.A. to form a government but eventually invited Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa to do so. Nigeria was launched into 1965 with huge clouds of uncertainty hanging over her fortunes. The country verged dangerously on disaster. Part of the agreement patched up to calm frayed nerves was that the government should be 'a broad-based national government'.30 The crisis left its mark on the body and psyche of the country.

## BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER ANT THE COLLAPSE OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC

The final drama that choked the First Republic played out in the Western Regional elections in 1965. A brief background to the election will be necessary to place certain issues in proper perspective. Given the ruptured nature of the alliance between the N.P.C. and the N.C.N.C. and the deeper details surrounding the emergence of U.P.G.A. and N.N.A., the elections were seen as a major test of the popularity of both alliances in the West. Only the N.P.C. had a stake in keeping Akintola's N.N.D.P. in power. As the election approached, the Western Deputy Premier, Fani-Kayode boasted that if the electorate refused to vote for them, then angels would.31 It was an advance notice of the intent to retain power irrespective of the wishes of the electorate. It was a reflection of the realisation that the N.N.D.P. was unlikely to win the election but was determined to secure 'victory'. The build-up to the election was marred by thuggery and other forms of illegalities. It was an open rejection of decency in favour of impunity. In the words of a researcher:"Electoral officers disappeared or refused to receive nomination papers of opposition candidates and declared N.N.D.P. candidates elected unopposed; other officers had their appointments revoked after they accepted nomination papers of opposition candidates; ballot papers were widely found in the hands of unauthorized people on election day; returning officers refused to declare results of the poll after the count, enabling false results to be broadcast from the regional capital, Ibadan.... In several constituencies, the A.G. candidate secured a certificate from the returning officer that he had won, but the victory of the N.N.D.P. candidate was later announced from Ibadan."[32]

The announced results of the election gave the N.N.D.P. victory with seventy-three seats and in a House of ninety-four. The elections result proved that the N.N.A. was ready to keep Akintola in power irrespective of the consequences. The true results of that election have never been known.

As announced, however, it released a negative trail that destroyed the nucleus of Nigerian democracy and eventually brought Nigeria's First Republic to an end. Having witnessed a massive abuse of the electoral process, the people of the West protested violently. Those suspected to have played a role in subverting the people's verdict were killed in an operation that has gone down in Nigerian history as 'operation wetie'. Law and order simply broke down. In the words of Akinjide Osuntokun 'the Western Region became an armed camp'.[33] The situation in the West became so confusing and difficult to spell out in precise words. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the state of things in the Western Region between the dying months of 1965 and 14 January 1966 can be found in the description offered by Ruth First:"The election fraud pushed the countryside into open revolt. The farmers attacked the big men who had sided with the ruling clique of the N.N.D.P., hounded them from the area, burned their crops, their property and their persons.... Telephone wires were disconnected, roads blocked, taxis prohibited from plying, markets and motor parks boycotted or shut down. One town after another in the west set up road blocks manned by Action Group or U.P.G.A. supporters to prevent N.N.D.P. politicians from returning with force to intimidate communities that had shown opposition sympathies. The police and the army were brought in to put down the revolt. The security operation terrorized the peasantry to the point of gravely disrupting the harvest and the marketing system. As for government, it had virtually disintegrated. What had begun as political violence to defeat a rival party in elections had gone into lawlessness uncontrolled and uncontainable."[34]

The federal government of Tafawa-Balewa turned to the army to put a stop to the killings targeted at N.N.A. supporters by U.P.G.A. partisans. The intervention of the army increased the violence and the region was tagged the 'wild wild west'. A North-South dimension was added to the crisis when northern communities in Shagamu and other parts of the West were

attacked by U.P.G.A. supporters for sympathising with the N.N.A. and Akintola.[35] At that point, the North may have realized that the solution to the Western dilemma it had cultivated did not lie in the military. In a 10 January 1966 editorial titled, 'The North Cannot Sit Back', the newly-established Kaduna-based and northern-owned New Nigerian newspaper stated as follows:"...thousands of people in the West are convinced that the last elections were not fairly conducted. They remain convinced that Chief Akintola has no right to be in power... Force is having to be used to prevent the violence in the West from spreading. In the North we cannot sit back doing nothing while our kinsmen are being killed in other parts of the federation."[36]

The situation in the West was out of control. There is evidence that the federal government considered other options outside the military; one it tried to impose on the crisis using the Ibadan-based 4th Battalion of the Nigerian Army under the command of Colonel Abogo Largema. The federal authorities allegedly toyed with the idea of ditching Akintola; removing him from the West to Lagos as President to replace Nnamdi Azikiwe or reconciling him with the imprisoned Obafemi Awolowo.[37] There are also insinuations that the federal government thought of other peaceful ways of resolving the crisis. In an interview he granted on the evening of 14 January 1966, Tafawa-Balewa, the Federal Prime-Minister did not foreclose the possibility of an amicable resolution. In response to a question on the possibility of a coalition government between the N.N.D.P. and the A.G. in the West, he told West Africa that:"The Action Group has accepted my mediation, but NNDP has asked for more time... If I used real force in the West - and make no mistake about it, I haven't yet - then I could bring the people to their knees. But I don't want to use force like that. Force can't bring peace to people's heart."[38]

It will seem, however, that developments had curved away from the Prime Minister's control. There are allegations that while Tafawa-Balewa was indecisive in putting a halt to the crisis, the Sardauna, Ahmadu Bello had other plans on the log-jam in the West. Perhaps piqued by the growing attacks on northerners in the West, he reportedly settled for a military solution. It is known for instance that on his return from the hajj in Mecca on January 10, 1966, Ahmadu Bello held a meeting with Akintola in Kaduna on January 14 and discussed the possibility of employing the army to stifle the U.P.G.A. opposition in the West once and for all. This meeting reportedly held with Colonel Abogo Largema, Commander of the Ibadan-based 4th Battalion of the Army in attendance. It is worthy of note that Ibadan was the capital of the Old Western Region. That same day, Largema flew from Kaduna to Lagos for discussions at Army headquarters on the outcome of the Kaduna parley with Ahmadu Bello and Akintola. He checked into Ikoyi Hotel. Oye Ogunbadejo has suggested that 'a larger and more effective military presence was to be organized in the West' as part of the strategy to snuff out the revolt in the West.[39] The question of employing the army to deal with the Western crisis appears to have become the subject of some correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Northern Premier. A letter believed to have been written on the subject by the Prime Minister to Ahmadu Bello was due for delivery on the morning of 15 January 1966.40 It was never delivered. The Western Region was still in the boil with no visible solution in sight and the scenario quite confusing as at the midnight of 14 January 1966. In the early hours of 15 January 1966, some middle level officers of the Nigerian army struck and brought Nigeria's First Republic to an end. One of the casualties of the coup was Colonel Abogo Largema who was tracked to his Ikoyi Hotel lodge and shot.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, there can be no doubt that the emergency regulations imposed on the Western Region created more problems for Nigeria than it intended. The partisan violence that resulted from it was the order of the day when the Nigerian army shot its way to power on 15 January 1966. The connection between emergency rule in the Western Region and the collapse of the Nigeria's First Republic cannot be dismissed. If we cast our minds back into Nigerian history, it becomes clear that the seeds of disaster were sown that fateful day of 29 May 1962, when the emergency regulations were approved by the federal parliament. With the benefit of historical experience, Nigerian politicians must be prevailed upon to look at the long-term implications of their political decisions. Politics should not just be about defeating opponents and conquering enemies; it should extend to using policies to better the lives of citizens. The catastrophic impact of emergency rule in Western Nigeria constructed to gain undue advantage over political opponents has altered the contours of Nigerian history. The wild ripples it produced has played a significant role in paving the way for military incursion into Nigerian politics. Emergency rule in the Western Region succeeded in replacing the A.G.-controlled government of the region with a group favourably disposed to the federal coalition. It achieved little else and the consequences were more damning than edifying. It is one of those ironies of history that the regional crisis the federal government attempted to control with emergency rule produced its own dynamics and assumed a life of its own. Since 1962, Nigerian politics has been buffeted with an overdose of political intolerance and vicious craving for bending the law in order to get at perceived political enemies. It has poisoned the Nigerian political scene and made fear of the federal government the beginning of political wisdom. In the Second Republic, this phenomenon was known as 'federal might'. In the Fourth Republic, it has come to be known as 'Abuja connection'. The practice in which 'stubborn' state governments are marked and threatened with emergency rule in order to

beat them into the 'federal line' is antithetical to democratic norms and should be discouraged, particularly given what it instigated in the First Republic. The ugly trend continues to grow with its entire negative undertone.

The practice of federalism in Nigeria has had its vitality vitiated by the continued use of the expedient measures to achieve untoward ends. In the process of pursuing perceived political enemies, many principles of democracy have been compromised by a federal government that has continuously behaved like a bull in a china shop. If Nigeria has learnt any lesson from the contradictions emergency rule visited on her national history, it should be that history leads the wise and drags the fool. However, the prevalence of unnecessary interference by federal authorities in state matters in a supposedly federal arrangement continues to be of great concern to all who understand the values of democracy and federalism for a plural society like Nigeria. If Nigeria fails to learn from history, then history will be compelled to drag her on the ground.

## NOTES

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13 West African Pilot, August 28 1961, 1.
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17 B.J. Dudley, Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973), 48.
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21 Statutory Instruments No. 1652, 1960, The Nigeria (Constitution) Order-in-Council, 1960, Section 65.
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25 For details of the census controversy, see Mackintosh, Nigerian Government and Politics, 547-560; Paul Anber, 'Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos', Journal of Modern African Studies, 5, no. 2 (September 1967), 175-176.
26 Anber, 'Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos', 175.
27 Daily Express, 30 July, 1964 as quoted in Mackintosh, Nigerian Government and Politics, 564.

28 West African Pilot, 11 December, 1964.
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30 See K.W. Post and Michael Vickers, Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, 1960-1965 (London: Heinemann, 1973), 190-218.
31 Akinjide Osuntokun, Chief S.L.A. Akintola: His Life and Times, (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 160
32 See N. J. Miners, The Nigeria Army, 1956-1966 (London: Methuen and Co. 1971), 150-151.
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34 Ruth First, The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power and Power in Africa and the Coup d' Etat (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 157.
35 Oye Ogunbadejo, 'Nigeria Conflict Images: Colonial Legacy, Ethnicity and Corruption in Nigerian Politics", 90; Miners, The Nigerian Army, 152-153.
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39 Oye Ogunbadejo, 'Conflict Images: Colonial Legacy, Ethnicity and Corruption in Nigerian Politics', 90.
40 See D.J.M Muffet, Let Truth Be Told, (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company,1982), 66.

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