

Truth at Whatever Cost: The Day of Empire Is Gone: Press Censorship in Nigeria during the Second World War

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Abstract

Press censorship in Nigeria, Britain's largest black African colony, during the Second World War was investigated, against the background of spontaneous support of colonial Nigerians for the exertions of the imperial power to defeat Nazism and make the world free for democracy and associated freedoms. Adopting the historical method of description and analysis of relevant archival and secondary sources, the study concludes that the rabid intolerance of criticism which the imposition of press censorship regulations foreboded in wartime Nigeria largely ended as a paper tiger. The press successfully circumvented the regulations due to the loopholes inherent in them, the palpable support of the newspaper publishers for Allied victory, and the liberal disposition of the Colonial Office, until late 1945 when the colonial state enforced full press censorship on the Zik Press.

Keywords: Media History, Colonial Nigeria, Press Censorship, Second World War, British Imperialism

1. Introduction

At the onset of the great world conflagration in 1939, the Nigerian press, reflecting the mood and inclination of the educated elite, had mobilized Nigerian support for Imperial Britain. The war was largely a European affair, but Nigeria, as a British colony, was constrained to fight in defense of its colonial master, despite the colony's safe distance away from the war theater. The Nigerian supported Britain because of his appreciation that a German victory "would sound the death-knell of all his legitimate aspirations" (*West Africa*, 25 May 1940:507), including the rational expectations of the emergent elite that the end of hostilities would not only open up the political space but also facilitate their involvement in the management of Nigerian affairs. In the absence of a viable nationalist movement until 1944, when the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was formed, the articulation of Nigerian political aspirations and interests during the period was effected through the medium of the local press (Mordi 2009). In the circumstance, the imposition of press censorship had the potential to muzzle the expression of Nigerians' yearnings for freedom.

Extant studies of Nigeria during the Second World War have focused on the virulent criticisms of the colonial state by the emergent elite, and the political consequences which they engendered from the colonial overlords (Olusanya 1973). The role of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's American-educated journalist and foremost nationalist of the World War II and postwar era who published the famous *West African Pilot* in 1937, after an eventful journalistic stint in the Gold Coast (Jones-Quartey 1965, Azikiwe 1994, Olisa&Ikejiani-Clarke, eds.1989), in introducing "an entirely new chapter in journalism" through which he "contributed in a very large way towards influencing thought in Nigeria" receives much attention (Ikoli 1950:627). Azikiwe's journalism not only catered for the educated and privileged few in urban areas but also for the poor, "even in the remotest corners of Nigeria", thereby bringing for the first time "into the stream of national consciousness through a popular press", elements who "had previously been largely ignored by other leaders or else underrated"(Jones-Quartey 1965:153). He thus significantly spread political consciousness and ideas of nationalism in the Nigerian interior (Coleman 1958).

Recent studies have sought to emphasize Nigerian initiative for wartime propaganda reluctantly adopted by the colonial power to keep Nigerians in a war mood, which on the long run, turned out to be an abysmal failure (Mordi 2009). It is shown that, as a consequence, postwar propaganda which was implemented in the guise of public relations became an instrument to contain surging postwar militant nationalism in Nigeria (Mordi 2011). The latter studies merely make passing references to the attempts of colonial officialdom to censor the press in wartime. The false impression has thus been recycled by scholars who have studied the press after Omu (1978), probably due to lack of original data, that threat to press freedom in colonial Nigeria ended with the seditious offences ordinance of 1876 as subsequently amended in 1909, 1916, 1942 and 1954, as well as the newspaper ordinance of 1903, amended in 1917, 1941, and 1954. These had sought to severely limit press freedom in colonial Nigeria by penalizing the preaching of hatred against the colonial government, as well as different classes or races in Nigeria (Agbaje 1992, Okonkwor 1989).

As a consequence, the sustained pressure of the colonial regime which made the press to walk a tight rope throughout the duration of the war remains neglected. This paper therefore examines wartime press censorship in Nigeria during the Second World War, 1939-45. No doubt, the attempts of the colonial regime to enforce press censorship during the war years, as well as the reactions of the press to such measures deserve to be better studied. It is a subject that has not yet received scholarly attention. It is thus the objective of this essay to expand the cumulative knowledge of Nigerian media history, by exploring press censorship in Nigeria during

the Second World War. Using the critical evaluative methodology built on archival sources, including the newspapers provided by the repositories at the Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan and the University of Ibadan Library, as well as secondary sources provided by peer-reviewed articles and books, the paper seeks to argue for the proposition that the Nigerian press successfully resisted the censorship regulations imposed by British colonial overlords, until the end of the war when the colonial state clamped down on the Zik press in its bid to stem the rising tempo of nationalism, purveyed by the latter. Three national dailies were studied (Coker 1965): Azikiwe's *West African Pilot*, published in 1937 (Azikiwe 1994); Nigerian Youth Movement's *Daily Service*, published in June, 1938, as a daily organ of the body (Ikoli 1950), which suspended its operations from October, 1938 to June, 1940, when it made a new start (*Daily Service*, June 1, 1940), and *the Nigerian Daily Times*, published in 1926 by private Nigerian and European interests, with Ernest Ikoli as its first editor, but which during the war identified with Nigerian aspirations (Jose 1987). Oduntan's (2009) study of some provincial newspapers upholds the view of Omu (1978) that they were "of little importance in the political evolution of Nigeria" because "they did not make any noteworthy contributions to the advancement of political ideas or to resolution of political controversies" (27). They have, therefore, received no attention in this study.

This study is significant because, at present, not much is known about colonial press control in Nigeria. This current enquiry helps shed some light on it, given the generalized assertion that the activities of Africa's colonial press "were often circumscribed by restraints imposed by colonial authorities" (Hachten 1971:67). Certainly, an examination of wartime censorship in Nigeria brings new insights into press control in important British colonies, and so offers a contribution to our understanding of both colonial government and wartime censorship. The press regulations that came into force at the onset of war had foreshadowed severe censorship and rabid intolerance of freedom of expression in wartime Nigeria. However, the evidence suggests that colonial officials tolerated quite a lot, and were even more liberal than one would expect, given that press control was enforced to a strict level indeed through much of the war, even in Britain. It is thus germane to investigate and explain this intriguing Nigerian phenomenon in which press control laws seemed to have existed during much of the war in name only. The Nigerian situation was a sharp contrast to the experience of Japanese "dangerous enemy aliens" of the U.S.A., whose press freedom was "systematically infringed" upon during the period without resistance (Mizuno 2011: 121-24). Indeed the evidence seems to suggest a counterpoint to the conventional wisdom about press controls generally during wartime, and this is significant enough to warrant a detailed study.

2. Press Censorship Regulations during the Second World War

Ordinarily, the free press, which acts as a watchdog on kings, lords and commons, and functions as a Fourth Estate, is one that is free to make enquiries without legal inhibitions (Martin 1947). But, as Broughton (1961) rightly observes, press freedom relates closely to the exercise of discretion by editors and editorial executives in limiting the choices they make as to "what goes in and what stays out of the newspapers under their authority" (35), in deference to the dictates of public obligation and duty. The key concepts are thus autonomy, personal integrity of journalists, and media self determination in relation to the content of the news media, as against its determination by the government or the public (Twumasi 1981:23). In reality, thus there are several impediments, even in democratic societies, notably Britain and the United States of America to the freedom of the press. These include the laws of libel, trespass, slander, contempt of court, confidence, copyright, of parliamentary privileges and the Official Secrets Act, which curtail even the ordinary citizen's rights to free speech and to free enquiry (Trewin 1975; Tebbel 1968). Such restrictions are often seriously enforced in troubled times, when people in authority become obsessed with concerns about measures and attitudes that would not stir up trouble or rock the boat.

The Second World War years in colonial Nigeria were such troubled times. As expected, the colonial government enacted restrictive press regulations when, on August 30, 1939, barely four days to the outbreak of the war, Governor Henry Bernard Bourdillon of Nigeria issued the Defense Regulations under the Emergency Powers Regulations 1939. The provisions of the regulations were derived from the Empire-wide Emergency Powers Colonial Defense Order in Council of 1939. The order was meant to be implemented simultaneously with Britain's formal declaration of war against Germany. It had empowered His Majesty to take all necessary and expedient steps that would enable him to effectively and successfully prosecute the war and ensure not only the supply of essential services and commodities to the population but also secure public order and safety. Thus the regulations contained drastic, comprehensive measures, with the potential to severely restrict press freedom in wartime Nigeria. The provisions of the regulations were so elastic that they could be interpreted willy-nilly to implicate the press. The press was required to take measures not to contravene the regulations, by voluntarily submitting any matter over which it had doubts for pre-publication censorship. The only option open to the press was to obtain the permission of the government to publish such matter without pre-publication censorship, and bear the consequences of its gambit (*West African Pilot* 16 September 1944).

Part II of the Defense Regulations, namely Censorship and the Control and Suppression of Publications,

Writings, Plans, Photographs, Communications and Means of Communications, formally instituted press censorship in war time Nigeria, with respect to printed matter of all descriptions. The Chief Secretary to the Government was appointed the Press Censor, under who was the general control of press censorship. He exercised this responsibility in the colonial capital, Lagos through an officer deputed by him to act in his name wherever he so signified, by notice. The law also appointed assistant press censors for Nigeria's Calabar and Owerri Provinces, where they were represented by the Residents based in Calabar and Port-Harcourt, respectively to whom all matter printed in their respective provinces had to be submitted for censorship. Outside the two provinces, all printed matter meant for censorship had to be submitted to the press censor in Lagos. The regulation wholly prohibited all publications relating to military strategy, the conduct of war, as well as publications deemed to be calculated to lower troops' morale or discipline or prejudice the recruiting of soldiers or encourage, or create disaffection among any section of the population within the colonial empire. The law permitted the press to voluntarily submit in triplicate to the press censors all matter before publication, either manuscript or in proof. The press censor would return his verdict in any one of three ways:

- (a) No objection seen to publication.
- (b) Responsibility for publication must rest with the publisher.
- (c) Must not be published.

In the case of photographs or other pictorial matter, the law required that they be submitted in triplicate to the press censor, who was empowered to either 'pass', 'stop', or pass subject to the blocking of some details believed to have the potential to give useful information to the enemy. The law also prohibited persons from publishing or reciting any statement or reports about the war made by other people, whether written or verbal, which were considered to have the potential to create alarm or despondency in the minds of those who heard or learnt of them (NAI, GR/ X18 Government Printer 1944).

The press accepted to be guided by these stringent regulations, which it considered as normal, for three reasons. First, like the Defense of the Realm Act of the First World War (Osuntokun 1979), the press viewed the regulations in question as temporary measures that would be terminated at the cessation of the war which had necessitated them. Two, wars generally necessitate the sacrifice of certain liberties as part of the general contribution to victory. Three, the press adopted the view propagated by Allied propagandists that Britain was forced into the war to defend world freedom and democracy against Nazism, and deserved the support of all peoples to succeed (*West African Pilot* 16 September 1944).

In adopting this position, the press was encouraged by Governor Bourdillon's assurance on his assumption of office as Nigeria's colonial governor in 1935 that the government would always take the people into confidence in all its actions (*Daily Service* 13 October 1938). By extension, the press expected the government to keep Nigerians informed on the general war effort, and also apprise them of tangible measures it had put in place to defend Nigeria against external attack. Thus the press publicized with anxiety, pronouncements of European dictators and other overwhelming evidence of intensive war preparations in Europe which had heightened tension across the globe, and assured the colonial authority that Nigerians were ready for the great sacrifice, demanded by the defense of the Empire (Mordi 2009). Nigerians so publicly demonstrated their loyalty to Britain and readiness for sacrifice as to make Governor Bourdillon to openly acknowledge that Nigerian loyalty had "been continuing to make itself manifest to me during my three and a half years as Governor" (*West Africa*, 25 May 1940:507).

3. Racial Discrimination, Press' Criticisms, and Enforcement of Voluntary Censorship

The enthusiasm of the press was soon dampened by the negative official attitude to Nigerians' demonstration of their willingness to be enlisted to fight on the side of Britain. The press alleged racial discrimination, and openly questioned government's attitude:

Does the Nigerian Government regard this war as a white man's affair in which the African people are required to take only a passive interest, or do they sincerely believe that the present struggle concerns black and white subjects of the crown alike, and that early success would depend upon all of us getting down grimly to the task together...? In all matters concerning military activities, there is a tendency to pass over the African as if he does not exist... (Daily Service 6 July 1940: editorial)

Allegations of racial discrimination were fuelled and sustained by, at least, three closely related developments. One, Imperial Britain very politely rebuffed Africans' offer to fight for the Empire, at a time when many French West Africans were already fighting alongside their French compatriots, on French soil, in the wake of France's occupation by Germany (*Nigerian Daily Times* 3 May 1940; 24 May 1940; 24 June 1940; 25 June 1940; *Daily Service*, 25 June 1940). Two, African servicemen were subjected to discriminatory remunerations, as well as denial of appointment and promotion into the officer corps (*Nigerian Daily Times* 11 July 1940). The press wondered "what prevents any African from being an officer in the ... very Army which is fighting for world equality and recognition of nations and races ...?" (*West African Pilot* 9 July 1941: editorial).

Three, the well known Eurocentric interpretation of the Atlantic Charter, widely publicized in the Nigerian press had inflamed passion. Africans strongly resented Britain's denial of the application to them of the principle of self-determination, and the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they would live, as well as the restoration of the sovereign rights and self-government of those who had been deprived of them (*West African Pilot* 15 August 1941; *Nigerian Daily Times* 15 August 1941). Nigerians' hope of a better future after the war and "implicit trust in the honor and integrity of the trustee Government for the full and complete redemption ...of the pledge that assures for us complete self-determination" were shattered. (*Nigerian Daily Times* 14 September 1940: 5). Nigerians' disappointment was worsened by government's appointment of a Syrian as a member of the Starch Marketing Board at a time that Nigerian workers were agitating against discriminatory wages, and the failure of government to appoint Africans to higher positions in government establishments (Mordi 2002). The press resented the appointment which it viewed as a conclusive proof that rather than sympathize with the aspirations of the Nigerian youth, government had chosen to patronize and offer protection to Syrians, notorious for their "un-British and un-Nigerian" trading methods, and who would have no room in post-colonial Nigeria (*Nigerian Daily Times* 14 September 1940: 5).

Press' allegations and complaints about racial discrimination in wartime Nigeria were indeed not unfounded. In fact, racial discrimination tended to permeate every facet of the colonial state. For instance, Coleman (1958) has shown that in Nigeria between 1900 and the late 1940's, colonial officials became very openly aggressive and discriminatory towards educated Nigerians, who not only sought to awaken African political consciousness through "vituperative articles in the local press", but also aspired to greater participation in the government, with the ultimate aim of displacing the white administration. Such discrimination and "white pretensions to superiority" (150) were even institutionalized in the social sphere and became so pervasive that:

Separateness was not only openly asserted and therefore officially supported in the civil service, residential areas, and hospitals, but it existed in most places where interracial contact occurred, including motion picture theaters, social clubs, and recreational facilities.... The color bar did not distinguish between the educated and the illiterate... Color discrimination, as it was practiced in Nigeria, was the product not only of preconceptions regarding African inferiority..., but also of the firm conviction that peaceful colonial administration and the perpetuation of imperial rule were directly dependent upon the doctrine of white superiority (151-52)

Not even African soldiers fighting for freedom and equality were exempt from the regime of color bar. Thus a wartime instruction issued to white troops in West Africa emphasized the need to preserve white superiority: "The British are looked up to, put on a very high level. Don't bring that level down by undue familiarity (152)". Killingray (2010) further shows that "Race was a determining element in the command and order of the British African colonial forces" (84). Noteworthy is the fact that racial divisions associated with the colonial military service, which exposed African soldiers to abuse from their white compatriots tended to be peculiar to Africa. For instance, West African troops who served in Asia found that hundreds of Indian commissioned officers related in terms of equality with their British colleagues. Similarly, African soldiers, while serving in India and the Middle East, "became keenly aware of the low level of their pay compared to the two shillings a day, plus overseas allowances, received by British troops" (95).

Conversely, the press adopted the position that "the relaxation of the old fashioned imperialist rule that the white official should not be friendly with the Africans will help the white man's prestige and not destroy it". So too, would the scrapping of such obvious disparities institutionalized as 'European post', 'European Quarters', 'European Hospital', 'African Surveyors', 'African Hospital', etc, that tended "to make more acute the wave of racial antagonism". The press, though not unmindful of government's ban on open discussion of the issue of racial discrimination, chose to bring the matter to the notice of Nigeria's new, 58-year-old governor, Sir Arthur Frederick Richards, who was inaugurated in office in December, 1943. This was because the press appreciated the fact that the "deepening sense of mutual contempt of color is the greatest single disruptive factor to the British Commonwealth of Nations" (*Daily Service* 11 August 1941: editorial).

In spite of this overwhelming evidence to support reports and allegations of racial discrimination in wartime Nigeria, government sought to discredit them as "the publication of half-baked and ill-digested reports which have the effect of stirring up ill feelings", and "amounts to giving direct help to the enemy" (*Nigerian Daily Times* 26 July 1940: 4-5). Consequently, Government reminded editors of the provisions of the Emergency Regulations, under which an editor who received such a report had a duty to submit it to the publicity officer and ask whether it should be suppressed, or the full facts published as demanded by "the system of voluntary censorship of the press" which "still holds good in England". Government threatened, if the breach persisted, "to insist that full proofs of the offending publication are submitted for censorship before publication". Government did not enforce pre-publication censorship because it "will be a great nuisance to the Government", and "a greater nuisance still to the proprietors of the newspapers" (*Daily Service*, 26 July 1940: editorial; 5), who should accept responsibility if the law had to be enforced in future.

Government's reluctance to enforce full blown press censorship derived from the fact that the publishers of the newspapers were fully supportive of the war, which they had clearly demonstrated in the columns of their newspapers. The press had adopted the view that the population of Nigeria was almost racially homogeneous but for the "very tiny fraction of Europeans who form the governing class". Therefore, it would be totally wrong to construe the legitimate complaints against the acts of this group against the people as inciting racial ill-will in the community. This was because the press had never been accused of any conduct which could likely create or encourage discontent against the government of Nigeria. Consequently, any government's recourse to the Emergency Regulations would be unjustified, and amount to "a lack of faith ... in the expressions of unreserved loyalty and burning desire of those behind these institutions to support the government to the limit of their ability and resources in the general war effort" (*Daily Service* 26 August 1940: editorial).

Besides, both the press and the colonial government appreciated the need for some moderation. The press was conscious of its role as watchdog and medium of education and enlightenment, even in wartime. This placed a responsibility on it to call attention to actions of any "blundering official" that could create resentment, as well as criticize or extol government actions as the need arose rather than "keep quiet or pour adulations". Conversely, it expected government officials to welcome "...fair, honest and well intentioned criticism" (*West African Pilot* 22 June 1944: editorial), rather than drive underground discontent which would "break out later in more virulent form". Above all, the press was conscious of its higher obligation to "serve the highest interest of the hundreds of thousands of helpless people in this country who look up to us to protect, uphold and champion their cause". Given that "to betray the faith of the pathetic inarticulate masses" would amount to "the greatest crime of our age", the press appealed to the authorities "to endeavor to understand our own standpoint" (*Daily Service* 30 January 1941: editorial). On this score, the press was not ready for compromise: "As for us, our path is beaten,-Victory for the Commonwealth, justice and progress for our people, and truth, at whatever cost" (*Daily Service* 28 August 1940:2).

A balancing act was thus called forth on the part of the press, and the colonial state. First, in order not to breach the censorship regulations, and provide the press censor with an opportunity to wield his "heavy blue pencil" against their newspapers, editors devised ways of being "very discreet" in the discharge of their duties. One way of achieving this was for editors to allow their subordinates to oversee the affairs of the newspapers, while they travelled out of their duty posts. A notable example in this regard was Nnamdi Azikiwe, who, off and on his duty post as editor during the period, left the *Pilot* in charge of his lieutenants, trained by him. Some of them were "able to hold the forte, as best as they could, during my short respite and absence" (*West African Pilot* 4 March 1940: Inside Stuff). A corollary to this is for the editor to avoid punishment by currying favor and reward from the establishment, in return for diluting the pungency of his editorials, or simply omitting, distorting, and adopting "rhetorical devices" rather than reporting contentious issues in obvious acquiescence to self-censorship(Lee1998:57). Thus during the war Azikiwe, the publisher and editor of the *Pilot*, as well as executive committee members of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), publishers of the *Daily Service*, including H.O. Davies (Business Manager of the newspaper and NYM Secretary General up to 1941), Ernest Ikoli(NYM President, and editor of the newspaper up to 1943), and Samuel Ladoke Akintola(who edited the newspaper from 1943 to the end of the war) enjoyed sundry favors from the colonial state, with consequences for the credibility of their newspapers(Mordi2008,2009,2011,2012).

Second, editors were constrained to choose between publishing information about the war or war news based on "the 'handouts' which the Ministry of Information and the British Official Wireless Service release to different Newspapers of the Colonial Empire," and remaining silent. However, these were so "standardized and stereotyped" that the newspaper became dry and drab, in spite of the facilities available to the press to gather news from across the globe, because editors considered the official handout "nothing of consequence to report" (*West African Pilot* 18 March 1940: Inside Stuff).

The evidence suggests too, that the colonial government tended to slow down the proliferation of newspapers outside its control during the period, using the newsprint weapon as a form of disguised censorship. To this end, a law which banned the importation of newsprint was brought into being in 1941(Government Printer 1941, Control). Governor Bourdillon applied the law in 1942, to decline approval to Azikiwe's request for permission to publish newspapers in Kano, Ibadan and Jos. The government had attributed its decision to the shortage of newsprint, arising from "heavy American war insurance risks and increased production costs" which led to "increase in the prices of newsprint" (CSO 1/32, Ending December 1942). Yet, not only could officialdom not be swayed by the argument that an alternative to newsprint could be imported without offending the Defense Regulations (*West African Pilot* 24 June 1944), it proceeded to publish its own weekly newspaper, the *Nigeria Review*. The newspaper, "fully funded by government", and "relying neither on sales nor advertisements", was a medium to disseminate war news, and provide accurate information about government policies and activities to the public. The paper's annual circulation figure which increased from its initial 480,000 in 1942 to 1,497,150 in 1945 did not reflect newsprint scarcity. Above all, the government went a step further to publish "war summaries in separate pamphlets in Igbo and Yoruba, two of Nigeria's three major languages, in October 1942" (Mordi

2009:245). In spite of this, newsprint regulation remained in force for the Nigerian press, even long after the war, until 1948, when control was temporarily removed from all types of paper, excluding newsprint and cover paper (Government Printer 1949, Vol. ii).

Outright prohibition of publication of news and information, or directives to editors “supplied personally and confidentially” (CSO 1/32 December, 1942), to desist from further publication of news or review of certain publications in the press, also characterized the regime of press censorship in wartime Nigeria. For instance, the workers’ strike of 1941/42, to press for the award of cost of living allowance (C.O.L.A.) and a general wage review to cushion the effect of war induced inflation on them, attracted drastic actions against the press and M. A.O. Imoudu, leader of the Railway Workers’ Union (Oyemakinde 1974), for supporting and actively participating in the workers’ action. On 23 January 1942, the governor restricted Imoudu from Lagos to Auchi (*West African Pilot* 30 September 1944) in Kukuruku Division of the Benin Province, a distance of 441 kilometers, and forbade the press from publishing any news or comment about the restriction. The restriction of Imoudu thus preceded the governor’s publication of a Gazette on 4 February 1942. Under the regulation contained in the gazette, he assumed power to prohibit and penalize publications about labour unrest, food shortages and related issues, which he had cause to believe might raise the morale of the enemy, provided he obtained a certificate from the Chief Secretary to the Government as proof of his belief. The governor’s opinion thereby usurped the power conferred on the courts by the Nigeria General Regulations of September 1941 to determine such prosecutions (Mordi 2002:22).

Also, prohibited at the onset of the war were all publications and records of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (Government Printer, 1940). In 1941, the government enforced this prohibition order and seized and confiscated all publications of the group which were already in circulation in Nigeria on the grounds that they contained “seditious and subversive propaganda” (Council Debates, 24th Session 1946). The prohibition was enforced throughout the duration of the war, even though some colonial administrators had viewed Jehovah’s Witnesses as “Harmless fanatics”. The enforcement could be due to the group’s indiscretion in wartime of putting “God higher(sic) than the State” and committing itself to “oneness of mind and purpose and devotion to...God’s kingdom and its righteousness” in its fight “for the New World and its interests”, rather than for the victory of Britain and its allies over Germany (FIS 1/62 No 56, ii 29/6/44).

The governor proceeded further in September 1944, to bar the press from further serializing a pamphlet, which in obvious reference to the exploitative and discriminatory activities of European firms operating under the canopy of the Association of West African Merchants (AWAM) had been critical of a tendency towards a virtual monopoly in Nigeria. Of the activities of the AWAM, Coleman (1958) has observed that the “near-totality of economic power exercised by a small group of European firms, together with apparent governmental support or toleration of that power, gave rise to a popular image of alien collusion and exploitation” (81). A similar image of collusion could be seen in the King’s College Incident, when the government instructed the press never to make any comment on the matter. Seventy-five students of King’s College, Lagos, had protested at the conditions of the school, which was then housed in a temporary accommodation, in 1944. They were arrested and charged to a magistrate court which subsequently dismissed the case, but the colonial authorities conscripted eight of the boys into the army (Killingray 2010:50). One of the student-conscripts, Samuel Oparaocha had subsequently died at the Enugu Army Hospital, in Nigeria’s colonial Eastern Provinces, and generated controversies (FIS 1/62, 3rd April 1944).

The press thus rightly complained that “Government is merely encroaching unduly on the liberty of the press”, given that publication of news or comments on these issues could not be reasonably said to “affect the security of Nigeria, speaking from a military point of view” (*West African Pilot* 16 September 1944: editorial). Acting Chief Secretary to the Government, Hoskyns-Abraham acknowledged that complaints from the press over government infractions on their freedom, notwithstanding:

It is, however, quite common for editors to consult the Public Relations Officer when they are in doubt as to the advisability of publishing certain articles, and they invariably take the advice they are given. In other cases, such as the King’s College incident, and the Imoudu case they are asked to refrain from comment, and in the cases cited they did so, even though they subsequently suggested that the news had been suppressed (Oyo Prof 2/3 No 60/1944).

The governor had justified his drastic measures on the grounds that warnings to the press to put a stop to the practice of publishing what he termed half-baked and ill-digested reports had failed to have the desired effect. The governor’s pressures on the press through the information officer to retract such reports were treated with levity by offending newspapers, which published government’s communications on such matters “without prejudice”. The governor felt that the press sought to deliberately arouse racial ill feeling and decided “without hesitation” to enforce the law (*Nigerian Daily Times* 16 August 1940), hence his publication of Gazette No. 44 of August 22, 1940, under the Emergency Powers (Defense) Act, 1939. This enactment was a consolidation of a 13 June 1940, amendment to the Nigeria Defense Regulations, 1939, which had prohibited the publication of any matter or information by any person, if such matter or information was received directly or indirectly by means

of a wireless receiving set. The 1940 amendment had also made it an offence to publish information, which was received directly or indirectly from a newspaper, book, magazine or periodical published in any country outside Nigeria. Publication of such matter was permissible only with a pre-publication approval of a competent authority to which it should have been previously submitted. Pre-publication censorship was waived only with respect to information transmitted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or received from the Reuters and Havas Agencies or had previously been published in the Metropolitan capital or elsewhere in the British colonies (Government Printer 1940: Amendment No 4).

Government's frequent threats to amend, or enforce the censorship regulations, and the focus of such threats and amendments on the capacity of information purveyed by the press to excite racial ill will and ill feeling, and boost the morale of the enemy reflected government's sensitivity to the issue of racial discrimination. Though it enjoyed official backing, the colonial government was most uncomfortable about racial discrimination being publicized on the pages of newspapers. Certainly, the colonial authorities were anxious to shield the population from the effect of hearing "the denunciations of the methods of their colonial rulers from German propaganda and attacks on the British by the Vichy French" (Crowder 1974:611), which emanated from American and Soviet sources. In furtherance of this, the colonial government of Nigeria, apart from the enactments in question, distributed a list of do's and don'ts to the press, which it duly publicized, notably:

Don't pay attention to any news that is not official and therefore not authentic. Don't be misled by anything you hear in justification of Nazi or Fascist methods. The reaction 'But there's something in what they say' is the reaction they want. It's attitude of mind they are trying to induce. Do leave your disputes and your agitations for change until after the war. Criticism of a government in wartime actually helps the enemy... (Daily Service 18 June 1940: 6)

The governor's sensitivity to press comments and reports could also be attributed to the nationalist sentiments, which the press purveyed and encouraged. The war had exploded old myths about the invincibility of Imperial Britain and about racial superiority, and opened the eyes of the colonized to the possibility of self government. The fall of Malaya had "struck a severe blow to white prestige throughout the non-European world" (Coleman 1958:231), and cast serious doubts about the capability of Imperial Britain to defend and protect its African subjects. So precarious was the British military position in the Far East that not only did African troops rally to the support, if not rescue of the embattled imperial power but also "for the first time the administration appealed for the loyalty of their subjects rather than assumed it for granted". Indeed "The myth of British imperial invincibility was shattered in the eyes of educated Africans with the conquest of Britain's Far Eastern colonies by the Japanese, a colored race". Also, "forever shattered" was "White supremacy, coupled with the hitherto monolithic structure of colonial rule" (Crowder 1976:612). Africans were, in fact, rudely awakened to the fact that self-government could be won, even if constitutionally. The colonial government, in such circumstances, refrained from taking any drastic action against their newspapers.

4. The Restraining Influence of the Colonial Office

The colonial regime, especially under Sir Bernard Bourdillon would seem to have acted within the ambit of laid down policy in its frequent threats and actual attempts to invoke the Defense Regulations on press censorship, with regard to censorship of reports of acts of racial discrimination. Such reports were similarly censored in the United States of America, as well as in other parts of the British Empire. The rationale for such censorship was to discourage the propagation of the impression conveyed by such reports that "racial discrimination was the policy of the Empire". Contrary to the evidence, the colonial government claimed that incidents of racial discrimination were isolated, and received no official endorsement, unlike the image which uncontrolled press reports would purvey. Besides, it was feared that too much focus of press reports on such incidents could not be "calculated to improve relations between Africans and Europeans", even outside the British Empire, but more seriously in Nigeria, where majority of the people were illiterate and said to have knowledge of geography confined to the "hills around their villages" (NAI, FIS 1/140 No 103, 1940).

Indeed government tended to exaggerate the influence of the power of the written word purveyed by the press on Africans, and hinged its hypersensitivity to press' criticisms of racial discrimination on the susceptibility of ignorant Africans to believe everything in print. It is claimed that the press in its publications paid scant regard to the fact that it functioned in an environment in which "the semi-literate readers lacked the critical faculties to distinguish truth from rumor and fair criticism from gutter abuse" (Hydle 1972: 112,129, 147). The argument seems to be that "the power of the press is in inverse ratio to the literacy of the public" such that "The more unenlightened the people are, the greater is their belief in the written word" (*Nigerian Daily Times* 17 June 1938: editorial). In this assertion, the contradiction inherent in the narrative of illiterate or unenlightened people reading and believing the written word is lost sight of. In actual fact, what obtained was "a wholesale condemnation of educated and intelligent African men and women ... as 'semi-educated' and 'semi-literate', despite their academic and professional qualifications in Europe and America", thereby insinuating that " the

African is inferior to the European”, and easily excitable, thereby “encouraging the assumption of airs of superiority to the African”(*West African Pilot* 21 September 1938: editorial). Omu(1968) notes that this tendency dates back to the end of the First World War, when colonial authorities strove to curb press freedom because of their assumption that the written word could inflame the people to undermine “the basis of colonial power”(280) . Yet, the evidence shows that “people as a rule attend to communications not because they want to learn something or reconsider their own philosophies of life but because they seek psychological reassurance about their existing beliefs and prejudices” (*Encyclopedia*).

There is no evidence that press censorship is only imposed in societies with overwhelming illiterate populations, or is not imposed in the most literate, democratic countries of the world. For instance, the act of “managed news”, leading to “credibility gap” in the United States of America is “as old as the federal government itself” and has pervaded all administrations (Krieghbaum 1968:59). In fact, in spite of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States journalists are “shot, jailed, horsewhipped, caned, spat upon, and reviled” just as “Their offices have been sacked and burned, and attempts have been made to pass laws taking away the press freedom embodied in the First Amendment to the Constitution”(Stein 1968:75). Press censorship is no respecter of ethnicity or race, and should not be explained or rationalized in that light. Rather, as Basowitz (cited by Stein 1968) has aptly observed,

When certain problems are so... seemingly...impossible of solution, and also are capable of inducing guilt in us about our ability to resolve them, we often deny their existence. The communications media, in reporting the news, confronts us with the continual presence of these problems and thus become agents which disturb the tranquility for which we yearn (77).

A sense of guilt was implicit in Governor Bourdillon’s strain to assure Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies in September 1941 that his threats against the press in Nigeria were not politically motivated, but followed laid down procedures in the United Kingdom of censoring press material, to prevent leakage of information and suppress rumor mongering. Lord Moyne directed the government, when dealing with reports of racial discrimination in Nigeria in future to impose censorship , as a last resort , and with the prior approval of the Colonial Office, after the failure of the informal approach (CSO1/35,Nigeria Secret) .The issue of press censorship, and the governor’s threat of enforcement further came up for mention in the Commons, where it was granted that even if the personal approach failed, and constant evasion of the regulations by the press warranted their enforcement, the governor needed to exercise a very liberal discretion in the administration of the Defense Regulations (*West African Pilot* 14 March 1942). By implication, the Colonial Office and the British parliament would not approve of the reckless enforcement of press censorship, even in wartime.

Governor Bourdillon complied with the Secretary of State’s directive and adopted the informal approach in relating with the press through press conferences, a well known instrument of media control. In this regard, the government, through its Information Office instituted regular, weekly “informal Saturday chat” with a view to establishing “friendly and regular relations with the press”. Unfortunately, the experiment ended in failure, having been abandoned after a period of four weeks during which “nobody turned up at all” (NAI, CSO1/32, Ending December, 1942). Press conferences were subsequently inaugurated in 1941, with the hope of Nigerian officialdom to “achieve something useful” by providing newspaper editors with the opportunity of discussing difficulties or points they wanted explained, both about the war and Nigerian affairs, generally. Government officials had sought, by this means “to cash in on the apparent willingness of the editors to be reasonable at an informal discussion ... to woo them away from the unreasonable attitude they were taking in their papers.” However, editors refused to be influenced such that “whatever was said or agreed or explained in the informal discussions made not the slightest difference to what was written in the papers”. Press conferences were subsequently suspended by the government which considered them “useless”. Instead, the colonial regime weighed the option of bringing the press “to book for their offences” by way of “a few healthy fines” (NAI, FIS 1/140 No 103, 1943). Nigerian press’ reaction was not abnormal, but similar to that of their American counterparts when Woodrow Wilson instituted “the first regular formal Washington press conferences.” He is noted to have had occasion to complain that a majority of the press corps took more interest “in the personal and the trivial rather than in principles and policies” (Krieghbaum 1968:59).

Persistent demands by administrators on government to take effective measures to control the press, including allowing affected officers to institute suits for libel and slander, arising from scurrilous and inaccurate articles about them could not sway adherence to the Colonial Office’s directives. Instead, government declared that, other than “its powers of persuasion”, it could not “compel articles to be submitted for censorship before publication” (Oyo Prof 2/3 C227 Vol V No 60/1944). Government further declined to allow individual officers to institute libel cases against the press because of their limited chances of success, given that articles which appeared libellous might on closer examination turn out not to be so. Given the loopholes in the regulations which made them so “difficult more precisely to define”, for which “it is not easy to secure sound foundation for action”, journalists could easily circumvent pre-publication censorship (Oyo Prof 2/3 C 227 Vol V 21 11 44).

Indeed under the restraining influence and ever watchful eyes of the Colonial Office, rigorous press

editorial; *West African Pilot* 19 February 1942: editorial) and “cause any necessity for official restriction of any kind on our work” (*Daily Service* 18 August 1941: editorial), including sending a deputation to the governor and apologizing to aggrieved groups for offending editorials, as was done by the publishers of the *Daily Service* in 1941. The governor also duly appreciated the importance of “excellent relations between the Press and the Government”, merely “talking in a fatherly way” to the press, “to go and sin no more”. He thereby secured the cooperation of “even Editors of the most rabid type” (*Daily Service* 8 February 1941: editorial; 2). In effect, as in the three decades before the Second World War, the Nigerian press of the World War II era functioned effectively as the main “vehicle of public opinion and the medium of political pressure and propaganda” because, as in the period before World War II, “those who owned and edited them were actively engaged in politics” (Omu 1974:521-39; Twumasi 1974:499-501). Besides, as Shaloff (1972) shows with respect to Ghana between 1933 and 1939, the evidence supports the suggestion that in Nigeria during World War II, the Colonial Office and the local administration were seldom in agreement on the question of restricting the freedom of the African press.

5. Threat of Militant Nationalism and Recourse to Enforcement of Press Censorship

The seldom agreement between the Colonial Office and the Nigerian Government to restrict the freedom of the press was reached in 1945, when the subtle application of the censorship regulations, under the administration of Henry Bernard Bourdillon (1935-1943), gave way to rabid intolerance of criticism and severe enforcement of press censorship during the governorship of Arthur Frederick Richards (1943-1947). While Governor Richards was away from Nigeria, on leave, the Officer Administering the Government of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria on his behalf, Sir Gerald Charles Whiteley prohibited the publication and printing of the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet*, leading members of the Zik Group, between July 8, and August 14, 1945. At the end of the European phase of the Second World War, (*West Africa* 22 September 1945) the Nigerian Government had revoked the censorship regulations with effect from 10 May 1945 (Gazette No 29). However, government re-imposed the press censorship regulations on 4 July 1945, barely two weeks into a Nigerian workers’ general strike, which lasted for three months from 21 June 1945, arising from government’s failure to fulfill its promise to them in 1942, to grant a wage review that would reflect the cost of living index. Both the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* had justified the workers’ action, and enjoined the government to be flexible in dealing with the issue (Azikiwe 1994). Instead, the government had blamed the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* for publishing false statements attributed to the Public Relations Officer relating to the workers’ strike. The government believed the publication had rubbished its efforts to persuade the workers to end the strike (Public Notice No 140).

Azikiwe deployed his professional experience to successfully neutralize the effects of the ban on his newspapers by using the format of the *West African Pilot* for the Warri-based *Southern Nigeria Defender*, which he had moved to Lagos via an affidavit, and returned to the newspaper stand. Thus “In spite of the title emblazoned as *Southern Nigeria Defender*, most of our readers rejoiced that the ban had been lifted and believed that they were reading the *West African Pilot*!” (Azikiwe 1994:372). Azikiwe further alleged that he had uncovered government’s plot to assassinate him, thereby attracting international attention, and local, popular sympathy. The Nigerian public had not the faintest idea about government’s real reasons for banning the publication of the affected newspapers because government was given to too much confidentiality: “too enamored of the metaphor of a mailed fist in a velvet glove,” and thereby left the impression that “the Government will not tolerate the criticism of enlightened Africans seeking the progress of Nigeria” (Oyo Prof/2/3 C151 Quarter Ending June 1945). Even then, the colonial government declined to renew Azikiwe’s Class B Wireless License because his claim that the materials provided by Reuters formed the basis of his allegation of government’s plot to assassinate him, “have since been proved to have come neither from Reuters nor from any other known news agency” (Council Debates 24th Session, Government Printer 1946: 13).

The Zik press reacted by so intensifying its attacks on the government that the state prohibited all its functionaries, including Native Administrations from placing government advertisements or notices in the *Pilot*, the *Daily Comet*, the *Nigerian Spokesman*, the *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, and the *Southern Nigeria Defender*, i.e. all papers in the stable of the Zik Group, with effect from 16 October 1945. Governor Richards also revoked the *Pilot*’s privilege of being represented at the Press Table of the Nigeria Legislative Council, for distorting his threat to dismiss the workers if they participated in future strikes, as well as his assurance that Azikiwe had “nothing more substantial to fear than the dark shadows of his own imagination” (Government Printer 1946: Council Debates, Twenty-Third Session: 9). Instead, the *Pilot* and *Comet* conveyed the erroneous impression “that the Government took a very lenient view about the strikers’ action and about the alleged attempt made by

certain section of the community to assassinate a journalist during the memorable strike". The governor who rescinded his order on January 9, 1946, when "the paper published a suitable apology" insisted that until Azikiwe effected "a radical change in his editorial method" he did not "consider that Government's attitude toward his group of papers should be changed" (CSO 1/32 Nos 1-132 3 April 1946, No 78). The colonial government was alarmed over the rising popularity of the papers of the Zik Group because despite official claim that they engaged in a deliberate "campaign of misrepresentations against administrative officers" with an overwhelming "cumulative effect" (FIS 1/62 No W.P.4227/81), "their readers have implicit faith in the truth of all they publish" (FIS 1/9 No 14 Vol II 13 July 1944).

Consequently, Governor Richards resolved "to go for Azikiwe" (Pearce 1981:298), and instituted a libel suit against one of the vibrant editors of the Zik Group of newspapers. A *Daily Comet* editorial of 9 November 1945, which alleged that Bernard Bourdillon, "a poor under-salaried official" so corruptly enriched himself during his tenure as Nigeria's governor, including accepting gifts from Northern *Emirs* on his retirement that "Today, Sir Bernard has control over well nigh a million pounds" had urged the Colonial Office to investigate him (*West Africa* 29 December 1945: 1269). The editor of the newspaper, Anthony Enahoro(1965), jailed for criminal libel, attributes his conviction to government's strategy to check the slide to civil disobedience spearheaded by newspaper editors in Nigeria. Azikiwe(1994),his employer, however, explains his ordeal "mainly to inexperience". This, coupled with "the impetuosity of youth egged on by patriots, who were well-meaning but singularly ignorant of the fine points of the law of libel" allowed Enahoro "to be decoyed into publishing what turned out to be criminal libel" against a former governor who was generally acclaimed to be "a very considerate, humane and reasonable person and a friend of the African" (302-303).

Obviously, the end of the Second World War, without palpable signs of movement toward colonial freedom had tended to favor the rise of militant nationalism in Nigeria. Governor Richards' appointment from Jamaica, where he had a record of high handedness in dealing with the educated elite was a clear indication that Britain was not prepared for a peaceful transfer of power soon after the war, thereby igniting Nigeria's militant nationalism. The Zik press constituted the instrument which, along with the NCNC and organized labour sought to merge economic with political grievances (Mordi 2011), to launch Nigeria on the road to independence. In this regard, the press had derived much inspiration from India, where nationalists' demand for immediate British withdrawal had focused world attention on the vast colony and dazzled the imagination of the emergent Nigerian elite (*Nigerian Daily Times* 11 August 1942). Consequently, the press which had demanded for a democratic Nigeria (*West African Pilot* 13 July 1942), guided by the firm belief that "The day of vast empire is past" while "The day of equal peoples is at hand" (*West African Pilot* 14 July 1942: Inside Stuff), deliberately strove to be associated with publications which would infringe the law and expose them to the harsh treatment of officialdom, with the hope of being counted among the heroes of Nigerian nationalism. Thus editors generally splashed stories which they knew to be tendentiously distorted and inaccurate in order not only to boost the circulation of their newspapers but also to project themselves as "young African crusaders against a devilish imperialistic capitalistic government"(FIS 1/140 No 103,20/4/43). Aloba (1959) and Enahoro (1965), two leading journalists of the period admit that they had sought to achieve their objective by exposing the weaknesses and failures of colonial officials, not only through fictitious stories but also reports and editorials couched in vituperative language, typified by Enahoro's criminal libel case, and misrepresentations of Governor Richards' views on the 1945 workers' strike and Azikiwe's assassination story by the *West African Pilot*.

6. Conclusion

The comprehensive press censorship regulations which heralded the onset of the Second World War had presaged a regime of severe press censorship in Nigeria. The Nigerian press had viewed the regulations as a necessary sacrifice for the defeat of Nazism, and exercised much freedom to criticize government policies and expose and ridicule the weaknesses and excesses of colonial officials, throughout the duration of the war. It thereby sought to demystify the colonial state and its philosophical underpinning of racial superiority. In its discharge of this function, the press largely successfully resisted official attempts to influence or dictate the content of the news media. . Conversely, official reactions to the press' exercise of its privileged freedom, even in wartime were largely within the bounds of the universally accepted principle that the exercise of any right must be in conformity with the law. Accordingly, the colonial government insisted that press should not defame any person, incite hatred, hostility, discontent or disaffection; impugn the integrity of government, or calumniate the executive arm of the state, distort the proceedings of the legislature, or disclose official secrets (Azikiwe 1978:2-3). The dexterity with which the press resisted and circumvented the provisions of the law; and the restraining influence of the Colonial Office safeguarded press freedom during the period, notwithstanding Governor Richards' punitive actions against the Zik Group ,late in 1945 when the British Empire and indeed the free world were celebrating the defeat of Nazism.

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