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3 February 1966

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New Nigerian Constitution

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A number of developments in recent days have emerged which will have a material effect upon the scheduled planning of the proposed Institute:

1. Preliminary reorganization and streamlining of the Federal and Regional Governments have already been introduced. You are no doubt aware of the fact that all members of statutory and appointed bodies and commissions throughout the country have been removed from office. The Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Research has now been changed to Agriculture and Natural Resources. The Permanent Secretary, Mr. Ohiy, has been dropped from his post and will return to his professional job at the Meer Plantation. The number of ministries in the Western Government has been reduced to 14 and Mr. Akinyemi no longer is the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Lands and Housing. He has been moved to larger responsibilities in the Ministry of Health and has been replaced by Mr. Shoga, with whom I met yesterday in Ibadan.

These changes by themselves are not nearly so significant as the fact that they seem to be the prelude to a much more drastic shake-up affecting the basic constitutional structure of the country, about which I have received some preliminary information. These changes will entail a most sweeping revision of the present system. A profound impact will, therefore, be exerted upon future development in the country and, as a byproduct, upon the nature of external aid relationships.

2. The proposal now being envisaged calls for a modified return to the pre-colonial administrative structure which existed under British rule. This would involve the dissolution and disappearance of the regional governments as they are now constituted. Instead, there would emerge a considerably strengthened central authority in Lagos which would directly administer the entire country through the establishment of a

modern variant of the old British provincial centers. If I recall my history correctly, there were at one time some eight or so such administrative centers in the North, four or five in the West, and a similar number in the East. In short, the structure of a unitary state would be established within which decentralized administrative functions would be executed, subject to direct Lagos authority.

As you can see, this plan carries with it significant implications for internal administration and relationships within Nigeria. It carries equally important implications for those of us concerned with external aid which, as this matter becomes more clarified, I will (from a general Ford Foundation point of view) discuss with Don Kingsley. Insofar as the Tropical Institute is concerned, it is obvious that past events and the changing shape of Nigeria will probably necessitate an entirely new series of negotiations to provide the assurances which an enterprise of this magnitude must have. I hope in the next while to have further clarification on this and related matters and will notify you accordingly.

3. Summary of the Situation

The situation in the country, while promising in many respects, is still subject to considerable uncertainty. It can, perhaps, be best summarized by four questions:

(a) Will the armed forces remain sufficiently united in order to continue to exercise reasonable administrative authority in the period ahead?

(b) If so, is this small body (approximately 10,000 men in the army, navy, and air force, and about double that in the police force) large enough and disciplined enough to enforce adequate security and control throughout the country as latent pressures and rivalries re-emerge?

(c) Is the North definitively tranquilized or, to put the question another way, will this region continue to remain sufficiently passive until such time as the envisaged breakup goes into effect?

(d) What will be the social and political implications when the military regime hands over or dilutes its command with civilian authorities: conversely, what will be the implications if it decides not to bring in civilian authorities?

The answers to all these questions are currently unforeseeable. Hopefully, we may be able to gain a better appreciation over the course of the decisive next few months.

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