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**Report of the Inquiry into the Administration
of the Affairs of the Igbo-Etiti
District Council**

By

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(Appointed to conduct Inquiry)

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Inquiry into the Administration of the Affairs of the Igbo-Etiti District Council

REPORT

In accordance with a letter of instruction addressed to me on the 9th August, 1955, by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, I proceeded to Nsukka and there held a public Inquiry into the affairs of the Igbo-Etiti District Council on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, the 29th, 30th and 31st August, 1955. Previous warning of the Inquiry had been given to the public by the District Officer, Nsukka, and a number of persons came forward asking to give evidence.

2. Twenty-three witnesses were heard. Nos. 1 to 11 were those that applied to give evidence before the Inquiry opened. No. 18 came forward during the hearings. Nos. 21, 22 and 23 the former Chairman, present Chairman and Chairman of the Works and General Purposes Committee, came forward to give evidence at or near the end of the Inquiry. Witnesses Nos. 7 and 18 are Government Officers called by me. Witnesses 12 to 17 and 20 were subpoenaed by me to appear and give evidence. All the witnesses heard elected to give evidence on oath.

3. Six of the witnesses submitted written statements or documents. These are appended to the Transcript as documents A, B, C, D, E and F. In each case they were read out in evidence and subjected to questioning either by myself or by the Barrister (Mr C. A. Abangwu, LL.B (Honours)) representing the Council and its Secretary. Questions were also permitted by other parties when it was clear that they had relevant points to put to witnesses. The last document in the list, "G", is a written statement in defence by the Councillors and Secretary. It is partly concerned with a series of allegations against most of the witnesses that came forward voluntarily and, in particular, the three members of the House of Assembly (The Honourable J. U. Nwodo, M.H.A., the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A.). It was only received after the public taking of evidence at the enquiry had ended and was not therefore, either given on oath or subjected to cross-examination. I attach but little importance to it therefore in comparison with the evidence given on oath.

4. Regarding evidence generally, the surprising feature is not the numerous instances of evasion, especially in admitting to possible transactions of a corrupt nature, but the amount of evidence directly alleging that corruption had taken place and giving particulars of time and place and circumstance. Generally speaking, I considered the group of persons that came forward voluntarily (with the exception of Mr G. U. Ojobor—the Secretary) as reliable witnesses. Although strong imputations were made against their honesty and motives, they had nothing to gain in coming forward and, in fact, were exposing themselves to a good deal of retaliatory malice. I was particularly careful in testing as carefully as I could the evidence given by the three Members of the House. They struck me as being frank and good witnesses, prepared on every occasion to give particulars of what they had alleged. More especially, when I called a number of persons that they had mentioned in their evidence, I found them prepared to stand by what they had said by firmly pressing in cross-examination the points they had made in their own evidence. Such witnesses as Eugene A. Aninze, A. P. C. Eze, Nsukka County Council Cashier and Councillor Eze Ugwuja Nwogbu were clearly being evasive in denying points that had been previously given in evidence by Messrs O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and M. U. Obayi, M.H.A. Indeed Councillor Eze Ugwuja Nwogbu was so determined not to give anything away that he even denied being present at a Committee meeting despite the fact that the minutes showed he was there.

5. The course of the evidence made it perfectly clear that the conduct of the Council's affairs had become a public scandal. I am convinced that public indignation was widespread and strong. While the three members of the House of Assembly may have played a substantial

part in leading public opinion on this matter, they did not strike me as dominating it. The indignation against the Council had not long before come to a head at a meeting of the Igbo-Etiti Welfare Association held on the 17th July. A committee was set up (which never sat) to look into the affairs of the District Council. The Committee's work was presumably forestalled by the holding of the present enquiry. The witnesses who were on the defensive, and Mr C. A. Abangwu on their behalf, tried to make much of the fact that all the members of the Association were not in favour of investigating the affairs of the Council. The point seemed to be that the only critics were a small maliciously minded group led by the three Honourable Members. I was unable to accept this interpretation, nor was I prepared to investigate the internal politics of the Association. It was with the District Council and not the Association that my terms of reference were concerned.

6. However, I was convinced that the Welfare Association did contain a very active section that lobbied against holding any investigation or inquiry into the District Council's affairs. Not surprisingly, this lobby was led by the Secretary (Mr Ojobor) and the former Chairman (Mr Ugwuogu). Evidence was given before me on this point by the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and Michael Ayogu, Nsukka County Council Driver. Furthermore, witnesses A. P. C. Eze, Nsukka County Council Cashier and Sylvanus Eze, Nsukka County Council Driver, when questioned on this point were clearly being untruthful and evasive. I am quite satisfied that after the holding of the present Inquiry had been known there were nocturnal attempts to dissuade persons from giving evidence before it.

7. The evidence given at the Inquiry covered a very wide range of transactions indeed. The District Council came into being on the 1st of April, 1954, and the Inquiry ranged over the whole of its transactions during the course of the seventeen months of its existence. During the course of the hearings, I became persuaded that the Council's transactions, especially as regards the appointment of staff and the awarding of contracts had been systematically corrupt. In practically every transaction that was brought into evidence, there was even in the absence of direct evidence of corruption, the inexplicable kind of decision and gross inefficiency (from the point of view of the public advantage) that always accompanies corrupt transactions. However, I shall only deal with those instances of maladministration that were, in my mind, conclusively perverse or dishonest. This is not to say that dishonesty or inefficiency were absent in other cases raised in evidence, only that the ones which follow are those which were pursued to a conclusion.

Examples of Maladministration in relation to Staff

8. (a) *Daily Paid Labour*.—Evidence was given by the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., the Honourable J. U. Nwodo, M.H.A., and Ozioko. Four Headmen were engaged by the Secretary (Mr Ojobor) to supervise the sweeping of markets. None of them had been previously employed by the Council, and none of them had any experience of this kind of work. They were engaged over the heads of experienced sanitary labourers, some of them had service of ten years and upwards with the Council and former Native Administration. One of the new appointees, John Nwona is a relative of the Secretary's. The new appointments caused intense dissatisfaction among the daily-paid employees.

(b) *Messengers*.—Evidence given by Mr Ayogu (on recall) and Messenger Ugwu Nweze. There was a vacancy for promotion of a messenger from the sub-scale to Grade IV/V. Ugwu Eze had 20 years service but the promotion went to Messenger Ugwuoke Obute with five years less service. This messenger had been personal messenger to the Secretary. Furthermore, Ugwu Nweze reluctantly admitted under evident fear of retaliation that the Secretary had asked him for £20 as the price of his promotion but that he had declined to pay. In his own statement the Secretary tries to make out that as Ugwuoke Obute previously had two stripes and Ugwu Nweze only had one, they both received a similar promotion at the same time. This is nonsense. The award of stripes is an irregular and outmoded procedure that has no direct connection with the only promotion that is significant, i.e., promotion to a higher salary scale.

(c) *Clerical Appointments*.—Evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., the Honourable J. U. Nwodo, M.H.A., Mr G. U. Ojobor, Secretary of the Igbo-Etiti Rural District Council, and Mr M. A. Ezea. A series of instances were cited in which less qualified applicants were appointed in the place of better qualified candidates. One example is the appointment of the Secretary's own brother, Francis Ojobor, as a clerk. He had only standard VI, while another applicant had Middle V and previous experience. Another instance was the appointment of the Secretary himself. Another candidate for the post was Eugene Aninze with much better educational qualifications. The Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., testified that Eugene Aninze was asked to pay a bribe of £400 and was still trying to get it back. When Eugene Aninze appeared before me on a subpoena, he denied the bribe and struck me as being evasive in any matter that might incriminate himself. A third case was the appointment of three licensing clerks in June of this year, just before such appointments would have required the Ministry's approval under the terms of the present Local Government Law. I accept the evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and Mr M. A. Ezea that these appointments were entirely wasteful and unnecessary. Although they were technically made by the Council as a whole, it was clear to me that the motivating force came from the Secretary himself. The Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., in his evidence alleged systematic corruption in all appointments, with appointments to clerkships costing £80 to £100. This provides a clear motive for the making of these unnecessary appointments despite the fact that at the time the Council was already in a critical financial situation. The Secretary's own explanation of all these appointments in his evidence struck me as quite unbelievable.

(d) *Midwives*.—Evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and J. Ozioko. During the engagement of a Midwife-in-training a better qualified applicant (Anna Obayi) was turned down. The evidence by itself would not be conclusive, but it fits in the pattern of perversity shown in the making of other appointments.

(e) *A. U. Nwodo*.—Evidence of the Honourable J. U. Nwodo, M.H.A., Mr G. U. Ojobor, Secretary, and Mr M. A. Ezea, Treasurer. A. U. Nwodo formerly with the Isi-Uzo Council had been involved there in a loss of tax money. The District Officer, Nsukka (Mr D. R. Gibbs) gave warning of this and the Health and Staff Committee resolved on the 9th October, 1954, that A. U. Nwodo should not be placed in a position where he would handle money. Notwithstanding this he was left, at the Secretary's instance, in effective charge of the tax section until on 23rd June, 1955, Mr Ezea discovered that another substantial loss of funds had occurred. The Secretary on being questioned by me was clearly untruthful in stating that A. U. Nwodo was put under the charge of Mr Agu (a temporary clerk) on the 5th November, 1954. Furthermore, the Secretary put forward (Minute 230 (b) of the 14th of August, 1954) A. U. Nwodo for Grade III post, a post for which he was not only totally unfit but also unqualified.

Examples of Maladministration in the Award of Contracts

9. (a) *Perverseness in awarding contracts*.—Witnesses, the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A., the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and M. Ayogu. Numerous cases of the perverse award of contracts were cited. It was rare for either the lowest bid to be chosen or the most experienced and competent contractor. In some cases contracts were awarded to tenderers that had never been contractors, e.g., contracts for staff quarter awarded to Isaac Igiata, a bicycle repairer, *vide* Item 408 of minutes of the 21st October, 1954. The Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., gave evidence that contractors were asked regularly to pay 10 per cent of the value of the contract as a bribe. Other cases of perverse award of contract were cited by the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A. Item 78 (b) of the minutes shows that the contract for four messengers' quarters was awarded to the next highest bidder, who had less experience than two lower bidders. There were many other such cases and the award of contracts struck me as being systematically perverse. In most cases, it was quite clear from the nature of the bids that the contractors had been told what the amount in the estimates was. The tenders were evidently based on this figure and any bills of quantities were made up to correspond. It is perfectly clear that the procedure of advertising for tenders and selecting from them was merely followed as a meaningless routine, while the real choice was made on some quite different and undisclosed principle.

(b) *The 1954-55 Chairman of the Council a Contractor to the Council.*—Evidence of Mr J. U. Ugwuogu, former Chairman of the Igbo-Etiti Rural District Council and various Council minutes. The evidence revealed that Mr J. U. Ugwuogu was a contractor in a small way at Port Harcourt and that he returned to Nsukka to continue work as a contractor there. During his time of office as Chairman, he procured numerous contracts with the Council. For example, item 287 of the minutes of the 4th September, 1954, shows that he was awarded a contract for a staff quarter over six other contractors who had bid lower than he. Mr A. J. Collis, Inspector of Works, Public Works Department (R.W.S.) gives evidence of work done by Mr Ugwuogu at Nkpologu Health Centre. The foundations were useless (Document F. 1) and Mr Ugwuogu was asked to stop until they had been excavated and relaid. He took no notice. It was only eventually after strong pressure had been brought to bear, that the incompetent work was remedied. The attitude of Mr Ugwuogu appeared to me to be that because there was no proof that section 38 of the Local Government Law had not been complied with, there was no call for any criticism. Comment is superfluous. Mr Ugwuogu's conduct makes a mockery of this section, and it is clear that it needs drastic reframing if it is to be of any effect in protecting the rate-payer.

(c) *Office Block Contract.*—Items in Council Minutes: 332 of 20th September, 1954; 354 (j) of 2nd October, 1954; 445 (d) of the 6th November, 1954; 458; 504; 509 (h); 513 and 514; 531 and 550. Also evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A., M. Ayogu (Driver), D. N. Obiwelozo (Contractor), and G. U. Ojobor (Secretary). This was the biggest of the contracts for which £5,000 was provided in the estimates. The District Officer, Nsukka (Mr Gibbs) gave full and useful advice regarding a suitable plan and tendering procedure. After strongly urging that tenders should be properly appraised, he was asked to do this in the case of three of the tenders. One of them, that of Mr Obiwelozo was eventually recommended by the Education and Works Committee. This was then turned down by the full Council. The views expressed by Councillors Basil Awoke, F. O. Okolo and O. Oshoko, as recorded in minute 504, strikes me as being clearly perverse. The matter was then returned to the Committee, who then recommended that the contract should be given (in flat disregard of Mr Gibbs's advice) to Mr Aniekwu. He was the highest tenderer and also had submitted a poorly prepared bill of quantities. Finally, on reconsideration by the Committee, Mr Obiwelozo was again recommended and the contract was given to him. The extraordinary pirouettes are inexplicable on any basis of straightforward dealing. Mr Aniekwu appears to be an Enugu Contractor. Evidence was given by Mr Ayogu that on the 7th of December the Secretary received a substantial sum of money from an Enugu Contractor. It was very shortly before, on the 27th November, that the Council had turned down Obiwelozo's tender recommended by the Education and Works Committee. However, a still more disgraceful aspect of this whole sorry episode is the treatment received by Mr Obiwelozo from the Secretary after the contract had been awarded to him. I believe the evidence given by this witness. Because he did not pay money to the Secretary the contract that he had to sign was deliberately withheld. He made a number of very strong complaints, including one to the District Officer (Mr Gibbs) and eventually was allowed to sign on the 4th of March. When I questioned the Secretary he stated that Obiwelozo had signed the contract on 1st February, the date that was (quite incorrectly) typed in when the rest of the contract draft was typed. Page 37 of the transcript refers to what is an evident case of perjury on the part of the Secretary. Even after the contract had been signed, the contractor was put to the greatest inconvenience and loss through having to borrow money at interest because the Secretary did all he could to delay payments due on the work done. Mr Obiwelozo was still owed a large sum when he gave evidence before me, and still had not been able to obtain a signed contract for the painting of the building that he had been asked to do. His treatment in the matter is such as to dissuade any contractor of skill and integrity from ever doing any more work for a Local Government body. It follows that the unfortunate rate-payers therefore can only be served in their needs by contractors that are prepared to pay bribes and who look to recoup themselves by dishonest work.

(d) *Buildings at Nkpologu.*—Evidence of Mr Collis, the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., and the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A. The evidence of Mr Collis, supported by documents F 1, F 2, F 3, F 4 and F 5 tells a story of incompetence and dishonesty by contractors engaged

to erect buildings at this centre and at Opi. I have already alluded to the fact that the 1954-55 Chairman of the District Council (Mr Ugwuogu) saw fit to obtain one of these contracts for himself. The fact that the assistance of Mr Collis was sought by the Council as a whole is to their credit. It saved very large sums of public money from being wasted and I consider that Mr Collis deserves high commendation for the purely voluntary work he did in this regard. That the contractors should, however, have attempted to get away with such dishonest work was the result of the perverse and almost certainly corrupt manner in which the contracts were awarded. As I have remarked earlier, the criteria of cheapness, experience and reputation of the contractor, and a well prepared bill of quantities were seemingly never given weight at all.

(e) *Patrick Ayogu's Tailoring Contract.*—Evidence of M. Ayogu and Patrick Ayogu. The latter was most reluctant witness when it came to giving evidence of a corrupt transaction in which he was clearly involved. He admitted, however, that he had been asked by Councillor Thomas Eze to bring £3. I consider that the fuller and franker account of the transaction given by M. Ayogu to be trustworthy. The gist of the matter, as I believe it to be, is that this tailor paid something like £3 to secure a tailoring contract of total value of £16 7s 0d. However, when it came to the point, he was only given a third of it, worth £5 12s 0d. Clearly this imposed a loss upon him. It also strikes me as likely that there were three Councillors all trying to have the contract awarded to tailors that had paid them. Paragraph 191 (d) of the Finance and Staff Committee meeting held on the 18th of June, 1955, refers. The remedy was, therefore, resorted to in this, and a number of other similar instances, of dividing up the contract. So what we have is not merely corruption, but corruption with cheating added. The state of public opinion in the area is not, therefore, surprising.

Maladministration in General

10. (a) *The Cash Tank at Opi.*—Evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., M. A. Ezea, Treasurer, and G. U. Ojobor, Secretary. When the Council was formed, only one of the two cash tanks (apparently through an oversight) was assigned to it. The second cash tank was at Opi, and not, of course, shown on the District Council's books. The Secretary had provision of £50 made in the Council's estimates for the purchase of a "second" cash tank and later suggested to Mr Ezea as Treasurer that he should prepare a voucher for £50, produce the second cash tank, and that they should then share the £50 thus dishonestly obtained. It was perfectly clear that this conspiracy to defraud the District Council was systematically and carefully planned well in advance by the Secretary. His evidence on the point was most evasive. He pretended at first to know practically nothing of the second cash tank at Opi. Yet eventually he admitted on cross-examination by the Honourable M. U. Obayi, M.H.A., (page 44 of the Transcript) that he himself had been present with the Driver when it was fetched back from Opi. In brief, he had himself gone to fetch it. There could scarcely be a more bare-faced fraud.

(b) *Financial Administration.*—The Inquiry revealed the lamentable fact (evidence of Mr M. A. Ezea, Treasurer) that the District Council's current liabilities exceeded current assets by £6,000. A whole series of pressing debts remained outstanding, including sums due to other Local Government bodies and to contractors, especially the unfortunate Mr Obiwelozo. Undoubtedly, this acute financial embarrassment was due in part to the waste of public money occasioned by gross dishonesty in the handling of almost all the Council's affairs. On the other hand, the Council's policy of a vigorous expansion of rural services, although it may have been too precipitate, is not necessarily to be condemned. Moreover, the principal cause of a critical financial situation was the lateness in tax collection. The demands still had not been presented to the Tax Collectors. A considerable reorganisation of the tax structure was in part responsible and it is not possible, therefore, to impute direct blame in this regard either to the Secretary or the Council. All that can be said is that there was, generally, poor handling of the District's finances. The accounts are in process of being audited and the auditor's report will provide fuller information on this matter.

Relationship between the Secretary (Mr G. U. Ojobor) and the Councillors

11. Evidence of the Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., Councillor Ugwu Ede, M. Ayogu, G. U. Ojobor and M. A. Ezea. The Secretary played a dominating part in most of the various

instances where there appeared to be corruption. Although I regarded Councillor Ugwu Ede as truthful in the main, I think he exaggerated the helplessness of illiterate Councillors in the face of the Secretary's managing ways. The Honourable O. C. Manu, M.H.A., has this to say on the subject:

" the Secretary is responsible for anything which goes wrong in Igbo-Etiti District Council. The Councillors are novices picked out from the villages, some teachers who had never seen an office and some old men who did not know what administration was. The Secretary is the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Inspector of Works and everything in the Council. He used to hold meetings with them in his house before they entered the Council or committee meeting, so that whatever he said in the meeting was regarded as coming from the Lord. If anything happens to the Councillors it is through misleadership of the Secretary."

I cannot entirely accept this. The Councillors could quite well have called the Secretary to order had they really wished to. In some instances they did reject his proposals, the entirely unjustified attempt to secure the promotion of A. U. Nwodo to Grade III, for example. In other cases, both Council and Secretary showed themselves at least in part responsive to the valuable and constructive advice offered by the District Officer (Mr Gibbs) and the Inspector of Works (Mr Collis). However, in general, the Councillors as a whole evidently preferred to join with the Secretary in enjoying the fruits of corruption. Only one Councillor (Ugwu Ede) gave evidence that was of value to this Inquiry and he clearly had his own private reasons for doing so. The other two Councillors that I called (Joseph Jacob and Eze Ugwuja Nwogbu) told lies to avoid making any disclosure.

Conclusions of the Inquiry

12. (i) The revenue of the Igbo-Etiti District Council has not been properly used in the interests of the area as a whole.
- (ii) The administration of the affairs of the Council has failed to act in conformity with the Eastern Region Local Government Law, not so much in transgressing the individual letters of the law but in a flat disregard of its whole intention and purpose.
- (iii) That the primary reason for (i) and (ii) was systematic corruption and dishonesty.
- (iv) That while this corruption and dishonesty was centred in the person of the Secretary (G. U. Ojobor) practically the whole of the Council were party to it and shared in its gain.

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(Appointed to conduct Inquiry)