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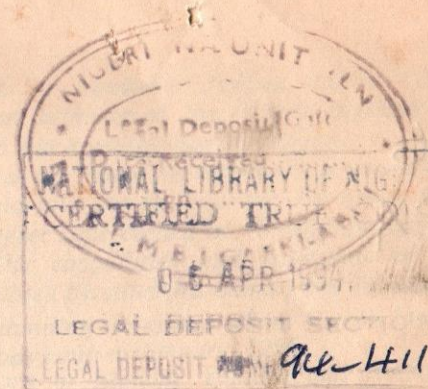
THE MAN:

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SIR ABUBAKAR TAFAWA
BALEWA

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THE FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF THE
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF
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1957 - 1966



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The Right Honourable Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa OBE, CBE, KBE the first Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1957 to 1966 was a gentle, honest judicious man. He undertook his assignment as the Prime Minister of Nigeria selflessly, with determination and love for his country. He was a man whose personal interest never superceeded nor interfered with his official engagements. The capabilities and capacities of Sir Abubakar were never doubted by either his admirers or his critics. Sir Abubakar was an outstanding statesman whom Nigeria lost in the most unfortunate bloody coup of January, 1966.

Sir Abubakar was born to Mallam Yakubu and Aisha in December 1912 at Tafawa Balewa a district capital of Bauchi Emirate. He belonged to the Gere extration. Mallam Yakubu, his father was an official liason between the Emir of Bauchi and the Ajiya, the District Head of Lere, the then largest district in the then Bauchi Emirate.

The British occupation of Northern Nigeria brought with it and administrative reorganisation to which all district heads and their officials were transfered and made to reside in their areas of jurisdiction. Hence the movement of Ajiya and his trusted official Mallam Yakubu to Tafawa Balewa where Sir Abubakar was brought up. Sir Abubakar's origin was humble though he was not a title holder as against all leading politicians in the North, where politics was still an aristocratic calling. Sir Abubakar rose to the top because his humble background and personal qualities.

His father's position and foresight gave Sir Abubakar the priviledge and opportunity to receive western education that was detested at the time. He started schooling at the age of ten when he enrolled at Tafawa Balewa elementary school in 1922. After completion in 1925 he proceeded to the Bauchi Provincial school up to 1928. The exceptional ability, intelligence and determination of Sir Abubakar saw him undergoing training as a teacher at the famous Katsina Teacher' College between 1928 to 1933. Sir Abubakar throughout his school days proved his intelligence and capability by always passing his papers with high grades. He always won the admiration of his teachers and colleagues because of his talent determination and good sense of responsibility. His best subjects were English, History and Geography. He won an English Eassy competition organised by the school authority when he was at Katsina Teachers' Training College.

After completing his Teachers' Training at Katsina he joined the services of his old school (at the time the Bauchi Middle School). He taught a variety of subjects but was more particularly interested in Geography, English and History. He later specialised in teaching

English language. His exceptional proficiency in that subject came to add more adjectives to his name in the years ahead. Sir Abubakar on his own initiative contributed immensely to the English teaching methodology. His students would always remember his methods of using implements and examples to perfect their proficiency in English. He invented one very important method of teaching that was later copied and turned into a book in America for teaching English language. He wrote valuable articles on English grammar in the magazine "Nigeria Teacher." His determination and zeal for knowledge made him to engage in private study through which he improved upon what was officially available (Grade II) by qualifying as Teacher Grade I (also senior Teachers certificate) in 1944.

His success through private studies earned him praise and respect from his colleagues. His drive for further studies did not end there in 1945/46 academic session he struggled and succeeded in obtaining admission and sponsorship into London University Institute of Education from where he graduated with a Teachers' Professional certificate (Diploma in Education). He came to Bauchi middle school this time as a headmaster, and in 1949 he was made first Nigeria Education Assistant. In 1950 he was made Education officer of Bauchi Province.

Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, as one of the few educated people of his time in the north, quickly became involved in the politics of that region. This started when he was a Teacher at Bauchi Middle school where together with colleagues like late Aminu Kano and Sa'ad Zungur formed the Discussion Circle in 1944 which was aimed at bringing the elite together to discuss on national and topical issues of the day. This provided a forum for meeting among Nigerians of different tribes, religion etc. Being the headmaster of the Bauchi middle school he was automatically incorporated into the Emir of Bauchi Council in 1946 following the directives then that all headmasters be made members of the Emirs Council of the Native Authorities.

Sir Abubakar became deeply involved in politics by virtue of the provisions of the Richards's Constitution, that the Native Authority councils of each province were to elect one member to represent them in the Northern House of Assembly. The Late Sir Abubakar was elected from Bauchi Province. It was at the Northern House of Assembly that he made his famous speech calling for radical changes in the pattern of Native Administration and its relationship with the colonial government.

Another major landmark in the political life of Sir Abubakar

was the formation of the Northern Peoples Congress in 1951, a major political party in the Northern Region. He was made its vice president while Sir Ahmadu Bello was made the president. In 1952 he was re-elected as a member of the House Assembly representing Bauchi Province and was also nominated to the House of Representatives.

A further constitutional change made him in 1952 Minister of Works, one of the first group of central government Ministers. Following a cabinet reshuffle in 1954 he was made the minister of Transport. Rapid constitutional development on the eve of independence brought further changes. Thus as a parliamentary leader of the N.P.C. (Northern People Congress), the largest party in the Federation Parliament, he was appointed in August 1957 as the first Prime Minister of Nigeria.

When appointed as the Prime Minister, he decided to invite members of the other political parties to join in a national government. He was of the opinion that there was so much ground to be covered in the way of political and economic preparation for independence, that cooperation among all parties was imperative.

After the 1959 eve of independence elections, Sir Abubakar became on 1st October 1960 the first Prime Minister of independent Nigeria. Surviving a stormy federal election in 1964 he was re-elected Prime Minister the post he retained until his assassination in January, 1966.

The late Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa had travelled extensively both in Nigeria and abroad. He was well-known and liked the federal House of Representatives where he earned the nickname 'Golden Voice.' He was among three members of the House chosen to speak in support of the Loyal Address presented by the House to the Queen when she visited Nigeria in 1956. When at one of the London Constitutional Conferences it was decided that Ministers should resume complete responsibility for departments within their portfolios, the late Sir Abubakar performed wonders when he took charge of the Nigerian Railway and the Nigerian Marine. It was under his guidance that they were transferred into Nigerian Railway Corporation and the Nigeria Port Authority. It was also during his time as Minister of Transport that the Coastal Agency and the Inland Water Ways Department were created.

It can be said that no one had a more profound personal knowledge and understanding of the complex problems of transport in Nigeria than late Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and no one had worked more single-mindedly than him to improve and develop the country's system of transport. He introduced several

daring projects when he took keen interest in the development and extension of the Nigerian major ports of Apapa and Port Harcourt. He planned the opening of the escarves entrance to the Delta ports and to the Niger and Benue Rivers. He fought for the extension of Railway to Borno which rightly according to him, was of vital importance to the future prosperity of the North Eastern provinces as well as that of the Nation. He also regarded the development of rivers transport of the Niger and the Benue as one of his greatest contributions to Nigeria. He had always looked States where he studied the magnificent American transport system on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. He had always looked back with pride his visit to New Orleans, one of the Southern states of the U.S.A. where he was given warm reception and was also made an Honourary citizen. He also visited Holland and many other parts of the world all in connection with the work of developing navigation on the major Nigerian River. His visit to the Tennessee Valley Authority in United State in 1961 resulted in the magnificent Dam Project at Kainji.

On the international scene, Sir Abubakar's vital roles can be seen through his contribution to African Unity and the maintainance of world peace and security as demonstrated in the and other International Organisations.

In 1960, he led a sixteen-man delegation to the United Nations General Assambly meeting in New York in which Nigeria was admitted as the ninety-ninth (99th) member of the organisation. There he declared his country's policy of friendship with all the nations of the world. Its policy of non-allignment in the cold war and its strong support for the United Nations.

In the bid to maintain world peace and security he suggested that fresh elections be held in the Republic of Congo in order to alleviate the grave disorders there. He also urged the great powers to refrain from interfering in the Congo affairs. Within a few days after achieving independence, Nigeria contributed troops to the United Nations Operation in the Congo and protested against French nuclear weapons in the Sahara.

At the Commonwealth Conference of Prime Ministers held in London in March 1961, Sir Abubakar urged for strong sanctions against the Union of South Africa because of its apartheid policies.

In January 1962, Sir Abubakar initiated and succeeded in convening a conference of African Countries as a prelude to the formation of the Organisation of African Unity. Major issues of African Unity were discussed at the meeting. He equally played a vital role towards the Unification of the two opposing blocks in the

Organisation of African Unity. (Cassablanca and Morovia). At the 1963 Organisation of African Unity founding summit in Addis Ababa, Sir Abubakar advocated for practical approach to the Unity of the African continent. He linked up Nigeria with its neighbouring countries e.g. Camerouns, Chad, Congo etc by means of telecommunications and by exchange postal facilities. Nigeria also entered into bilateral agreements and discussed common problems with many of its neighbours.

On the decolonization of the continent, Sir Abubakar declared that Nigeria was "prepared to do anything towards the Liberation of all African Countries." Nigeria, he said will never compromise on the question of colonialism and recial discrimination.

The late Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was a moderate person, with tremendous capacity for public relations. He was humble and hard working, a great farmer who believed in doing everything in the farm by himself. He was a very intelligent and talented man with good sense of responsibility and understanding. He had always put the interest of the Nation, its unity and prosperity first before other things. Sir Abubakar was ready to die for his country, though not the way he was murdered.

SUMMARY

- *Born in December, 1912
- *Attended Tafawa Balewa Elementary School 1922-25
- *Bauchi Provincial School 1925-28
- *Katsina Teacher's Training College 1928-33
- *Obtained Grade I Certificate (Senior Teachers' Cert.) 1944
- *London University (Institute of Education) 1945-46.
- Teacher, Bauchi Middle School 1933
- *Headmaster, Bauchi Middle School 1944-47
- *Education Assistant, Bauchi Province 1949.
- *Education Officer, Bauchi Province 1950
- *Pioneer Member, Bauchi Discussion Circle 1944
- *Member Native Authority Council 1947
- *Member Northern House of Assambly 1947
- *Nigerian Delegate to Commonwealth Parliamentary Conf. 1948
- *Member Macpherson Constitution Drafting Committee 1951
- *Nigerian member, Festival of Britain 1951
- *Minister of Works 1952
- *Awarded O.B.E. 1952
- *Minister of Transport 1954-57
- *Nigerian Representative, west African Army Advisory Council in

charge of the Defence of the British West African Territories
1955-57

- *Member, Governor-General Privy Council 1955*
- *Visited U.S.A. to study Mississippi water ways;*
- *Honorary citizen of New Orleans 1955.*
- *Awarded C.B.E. 1955*
- *Appointed Prime Minister 1957*
- *Awarded K.B.E. 1958*
- *Elected the first Prime Minister of Independent Nigeria 1960*
- *He led a sixteen-man delegation to the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York; Nigeria admitted as the ninety-ninth member of the organization 1960.*
- *Awarded Honourary Doctorate Degree in 1960 and 1961 in London and New York respectively.*
- *Convened a conference of African countries 1962.*
- *Killed on Saturday 15th January, 1966*
- *Publication (Shehu Umar) 1934*
- *HOBBIES: Farming, Fishing, Hunting and Cricket.*

