

The Nigeria Win the War Fund: An Unsung Episode in Government-Press Collaboration in Nigeria during the Second World War

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ABSTRACT Contrary to prevailing notions, Nigerians, inspite of their distance from the theater of war, felt the great impact of World War II and made substantial sacrifices which contributed to Allied victory over Nazism. Using Archival sources and national dailies ignored by previous scholars, the paper concludes that there was positive collaboration between the colonial government and Nigerian press in Britain's Win the War efforts in Nigeria as illustrated by the Nigeria Win the War Fund.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Second World War in awakening African political consciousness (Crowder 1974) and in heightening the tempo of political activities (Olusanya 1980a) against the background of the pre-war political docility of the elite (Hodgkin 1951; Crowder 1984) and the concomitant hope of the colonial overlords to exercise unchallenged authority for generations (Ajayi and Crowder 1974) has been studied. It is recognized that in Nigeria, the press was the major vehicle for disseminating the new consciousness and ideas of nationalism (Coleman 1958) during the war years, with a consequent backlash from the colonial state (Olusanya 1973). The literature thus places undue emphasis on the role of the press in propagating the agenda of the emergent elite during the war for which it is portrayed as agents of destabilization, propagators of racial ill-will and malice, purveyors of literary filth, and inciters in vituperative language of sedition against the colonial power (Chick 1971; Olusanya 1980b; Pearce 1981). It is often explained that the role and influence of the press were essentially negative due to its hold on semi-literate readers, who "lacked the critical faculties to distinguish truth from rumor and fair criticism from gutter abuse" (Hydle 1972). In effect, Nigerians of the World War II era are portrayed as people who were insensitive to government's appeal for self-sacrifice and who contributed next to nothing to the win-the-war efforts of Britain in Nigeria. This erroneous assessment of Nigerians' exertions during the war is rationalized as understandable

since Nigerians were so far removed from the theater of war and from the great issues at stake (Coleman 1958).

Such negative views of the role of the Nigerian press, and of Nigerian contributions to World War II efforts neither present the whole picture nor reflect the evidence (Mordi 1994). Rather, they relegate and indeed obscure the positive collaboration, at least from the British perspective, between the colonial government and the press in Britain's win-the-war efforts in Nigeria during the war years. This paper sets out to present a fuller picture based on evidence of inter-racial cooperation and collaboration for the defeat of Nazism with the press acting as the driving-force and great mobilizer at a critical stage during the war when the morale of the Allied Forces was abysmally low. This point is important because the episode in question occurred at a time when Nigeria lacked a united political front to galvanize energies in one direction. The episode chosen, long neglected by scholars but which deserves to be studied in great detail for its effect in getting Nigerians to remain materially and emotionally involved in the win the war efforts of Britain throughout the duration of the war, is the Nigeria win the war fund, 1940-1945.

BACKGROUND TO THE NIGERIA WIN THE WAR FUND

As is well known, on 3 September 1939, the Government of Imperial Britain declared war on Germany over the latter's occupation of Polish territory, the last of such German aggressions,

which struck a deathblow to collective security in Europe. Great Britain quickly enlisted the support of France, a colonial power like herself in the war with Germany. Thus, what started as a European war soon spread like wild, harmattan (dry, dust-laden wind) conflagration as virtually the whole world gradually became engulfed in the holocaust. For British colonies, including Nigeria, the defense of the colonial master was imperative. At any rate, the colonies, as huge reserves of men, food and raw materials, were vital to the success of British war efforts. This fact made them potential German military targets, and, therefore, psychologically conditioned them to fight on the side of Britain. Their psychological conditioning had been facilitated by pre-war British propaganda, which emphasized Hitler's equation of Africans with apes in his *Mein Kampf* and their possible enslavement in the event of German victory. The thought of such dehumanization, and wild rumors that Nigeria would be ceded to Germany by Britain to meet the demands of the former for the return of her territories in Africa on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities, caused considerable anxiety and immeasurable panic throughout Nigeria. It elicited from Nigerians profuse professions of unalloyed loyalty to Britain and their readiness to pay the supreme price in defense of the Empire (Mordi 1994). To the colonial governor, such professions of loyalty were genuine reflections of an abiding faith in the British connection and an indication that, in spite of Nigeria's location in a remote corner of the Gulf of Guinea, her inhabitants followed international events and their implications with a keen interest (Bourdillon 1940).

Events moved with amazing rapidity in the European theaters of war. The ferocious German military machine was unleashed on the Allied Forces with unprecedented tenacity and intensity. By May 1940, the German army had not only occupied the Low Countries, but was menacingly knocking at the gates of France. Beleaguered France sent out distress calls to her ally, Great Britain. In the face of the lightning German advance and in response to the distress call, a new British war cabinet ordered the full mobilization of all resources of Great Britain to meet the German menace. Great Britain consequently poured men and material in unprecedented numbers into France. The stage was thus, set for the famous battle of Dunkirk, which ended in victory for Germany and great

losses in men and material for Imperial Britain. To make matters worse for the Allies, Mussolini's Italy, a member of the Axis powers, declared war on them on 10 June 1940. France was crushed, as German troops marched unchallenged into Paris on 14 June 1940, and accepted France's official surrender on 17 June 1940.

The British government, left alone to confront the German menace, felt abandoned and let down by an unreliable France, but elected to fight on. The French government, on its part had expected Britain to suffer a quick defeat at the hands of Germany to wipe away the shame and sorrow of France's occupation (Kent 1992). In their decision to fight on, the British, therefore, counted on the enormous colonial resources at their disposal. Thus, by mid-June 1940, distress calls and admonitions for help were ringing out to the colonies from official quarters. Lord Lloyd (1940), Britain's new Secretary of State for the Colonies, telegraphed a circular dispatch to the Governors of British colonies on the nature and manner of their contributions to war efforts in the immediate future in line with the British wartime economic policy of bringing to "maximum the positive contribution of the colonies to the immediate war effort in the way of supplies", and reducing to the minimum, demands on men, material and money, which might be released to the Empire, "either at home or overseas". The colonial secretary warned "that the new conditions must entail not only postponement of progress but some curtailment of existing social and other services..." for Nigerians.

The colonial secretary's circular thus suspended the implementation of the Development and Welfare Act for the Colonies (Feb. 1940) under which the Imperial Government of Britain had pledged its assistance to colonial territories in maintaining sundry services at proper standards. The enactment, widely reported in the Nigerian press, had elicited widespread enthusiasm in Nigeria and even beyond. Such enthusiasm became short-lived, because colonial Britain called upon Nigerians to make sacrifices to stem the tide of Nazism. Nigerians accepted the challenge, and the local press articulated calls for specific contributions geared towards warding off the German menace.

Against this background, the Nigeria Win the War Fund was inaugurated on 15 June 1940 by the *Nigerian Daily Times*. The event took place in the wake of France's capitulation to Germany

and barely two weeks after the Dunkirk debacle, when the need for weapons was acute. Britain had lost 700 tanks, 2,450 guns and 50,000 vehicles of all kinds at Dunkirk (Public Relations Department 1945). The objective of the Nigeria Win the War Fund was, therefore the purchase of a tank, or an aeroplane, for donation to the British army. The scheme obviously drew its inspiration from similar schemes in Asia and Latin America, where Malaya, and Hong Kong as well as West Indies, and Jamaica had made substantial financial contributions to the Imperial Government for the purchase of military equipment. Similarly, in West Africa, the Legislative Council of the Gold Coast, Nigeria's neighbor, had lent the sum of £100,000 to the Imperial Government, while the governor of the West African colony had launched a separate fund for the purchase of a "Spitfire" Bomber (Mordi 1994). Nonetheless, there is no known evidence of such a scheme being inaugurated anywhere else by the press in collaboration with the government. The Nigerian example was, therefore, uniquely Nigerian, and illustrates the healthy collaboration between the local press and the colonial government in the fight against Nazism. The Nigerian press of the First World War era had similarly supported and encouraged Nigerian monetary contributions and donations to various organizations, including the National Relief Fund connected with that war (Osuntokun 1979).

Government-Press Collaboration in the Nigeria Win the War Fund

Available evidence shows that the nationalist press offered the initial suggestions for some contributions, either monetary or otherwise, from Nigerians to support Britain in stemming the German onslaught, which seemed overwhelming by the first quarter of 1940. For instance, the press, while emphasizing that Britain was fighting for universal freedom, urged Nigerians to be prepared to make more sacrifices in support of the war, different from the increased tariff rates they were accustomed to but not unlike similar sacrifices made by Africans during the First World War in defense of the "Mother Countries", including contributions to Imperial War Funds, Aeroplane Fund and contributions in men and material. Similar contributions were being made in the Gold Coast where Sir Ofori Atta persuaded his people to contribute to the Empire's war efforts

to the tune of £10,000 meant for the Gold Coast War Charities Fund. On this score, the *West African Pilot* (1940) canvassed a wholehearted support of the Imperial power by Nigerians:

Now that the war is becoming intensified on the economic as well as on the military front, far from being lackeys of Imperialism, as some ill-disposed leftists abroad might think, this newspaper urges support, morally and materially, towards the cause of the Allies.

Much as we would criticize British Colonial Administration, it is plain that, with all its faults, it promises a safe and secure future to all of us, only, at times, it is felt that the promise is vague and indefinite. Howbeit, we are at war. Let us put our shoulders to the wheel and let the cylinder work on all fours in order to destroy Hitlerism. Our Empire is in need. Let us render to it all the aid we could.

Similar admonitions to readers to support the Empire war efforts came from the *Daily Service*, which drew attention to generous monetary contributions and the gift of a quantity of scrap iron towards Britain's war efforts from the tiny Island of Bermuda. In urging Nigerians to emulate this example in spite of the large sum of £30,000 which they had already given, the *Daily Service* (June 1940) declared that:

there are many who cannot escape the feeling that Nigeria is not pulling her full weight as far as our war effort is concerned.... We are not in a position to vote millions out of the public treasury towards the Imperial Government's war expenditure, which must now be running to several million pounds daily. But we believe there are many ways in which we can help. The people are prepared if only government would indicate in what way they could be useful.

Unanimous support for monetary contributions from the press was significant for at least four reasons. First, the newspapers were national dailies, published in Lagos, the seat of the colonial government, were widely circulated, and enjoyed a country-wide coverage. The *Nigerian Daily Times*, *West African Pilot*, and the *Daily Service* posted average daily circulations of 40,000, 17,000 and 10,000 copies, respectively during the period (Coker 1952), and were, therefore, positioned to widely disseminate the idea which they canvassed.

Second, the newspapers were patronized in varying degrees by different segments of the Nigerian population. For instance, the *Daily*

Service enjoyed the patronage of NYM supporters made up of Lagos-based Yoruba elite, rural-based traditional leaders and their supporters throughout the western provinces (Grant 1975). *The Pilot* on the other hand, was very popular among the youths of the country, Igbo and non-Igbo alike, previously marginalized groups who saw Azikiwe's success as a symbol of their own "achievements and emancipation" (Coleman 1958). Even Yoruba elements who were not satisfied with the conservatism and moderation which characterized the leadership provided by the Lagos elite also gave their support to Azikiwe and his newspapers. There is no doubt, therefore, that the newspapers reflected public opinion and guided government policy (Ikoli 1950). Their readers included both Christians and Muslims, none of whom constituted any distinct significant bloc or pressure group in support of or in opposition to the War, or published any nationally circulated daily newspaper which articulated or publicized any distinct position on the war (Kitchen 1956). At any rate, the widely circulated publications of the American-based Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, including books and tracts read largely by Jehovah's Witnesses, a sect that was opposed to the war and to all earthly governments and kingdoms, remained completely prohibited from circulation throughout the duration of the war, beginning from 13 March 1940 (Government Printer 1940).

Third, the press enjoyed the confidence of Nigerian people who, as a consequence, looked up to it and its practitioners for guidance and information. This was because pressmen identified themselves with the yearnings, aspirations and grievances of the readers with an "enthusiasm which lacked journalistic dispassion", and viewed themselves as "pilots, guardians, spokesmen, defenders, sentinels, monitors and advocates" of the people (Ogunade 1981). This feature of the press, namely its overwhelming rapport with its readership could be traced to the immediate pre-war years following the rise of popular journalism which Azikiwe inaugurated in 1937 with the publication of the *West African Pilot*, which gave voice to previously voiceless rural dwellers, semi-educated urban workers of various shades and affiliations and forever broke the bourgeois leanings of the Victorian press which preceded it. In thus giving publicity to all classes of Nigerians irrespective of their stations, the press of the Azikiwe era aroused a mass audience

like never before in the history of Nigeria (Coker 1965). In fact, "for the first time, the reading public was not merely a privileged coastal intelligentsia but a relatively wide cross-section of the population" (Ainslie 1966). Thus, the low level of literacy in Nigeria—about 17 percent of Southern Nigerians above the age of seven were literate in the Roman script by 1952 (Sklar and Whitaker 1966) notwithstanding, the press could mobilize the people because even illiterate villagers enthusiastically had the contents of newspaper read to them by their fairly literate relations (Anameleze Jr. 1979) and especially in the hinterland, newspapers were passed from hand to hand (Aloba 1959). This was because, the population, even though mostly illiterate longed for "knowledge and reading material" (Ogunsanwo 1978) to keep it abreast of developments around it.

Besides, the life style of the population still emphasized a common communitarian ethos, whereby family and kinship ties remained strong so much so that families and friends could gather to have the content of a newspaper read even aloud to the hearing of all (Schwarz 1965). It is common knowledge that one newspaper was circulated among at least ten readers while others disseminated by word of mouth information, which they gleaned from the newspapers (Mackintosh 1966). It was by reading and interpreting news to illiterate rural folk, that discussion of affairs of the day was engendered. The views of the pressmen, local Nigerians, who could write and speak the Whiteman's language and dispute with the colonial overlord in his own terms were applauded and identified with. It is in this sense that the "high prestige attaching to education" and the "great authority" (Coleman 1960) which the written word tended to command over the illiterate and semi-literate folk can be understood. Thus could also be explained the effectiveness of the press as a great mobilizer. As Coleman (1958) aptly puts it, "Nigerians throughout the country were for the first time permitted the stimulation of vicarious participation". Thus, as disseminators and purveyors of information and opinions, the newspapers wielded an immense influence, especially given the political milieu in which they operated. Indeed without television and a developed radio service to compete with for audience, the press constituted the true mass media of wartime Nigeria. It deployed much space and its resources to mobilize support for and ensure the success of the Nigeria Win the War Fund.

Fourth, it should be stressed that the three newspapers functioned as the nuclei around which the contending political tendencies of the period were galvanized. For during the period up to 1944 which represented the high tide of colonial exploitation, there was no serious nationalist political organization in Nigeria, which could articulate the yearnings and aspirations of the people nor mobilize them for or against colonialism. The press and pressmen thus functioned in a dual capacity as opinion molders and great mobilizers in the mould of political leaders, mounting the podium and the soap box to popularize their viewpoints. The facility with which the press accomplished the latter role in spite of the differences between its editor-publishers was not lost on the colonial overlords. It is, therefore, necessary to provide a brief background of the newspapers' editors and publishers as well as of the interests they represented.

The *West African Pilot*, first in the Zik Group of newspapers, was the foremost nationalist newspaper in Nigeria during the Second World War and indeed throughout the colonial period. The American-trained Nigeria's leading journalist and nationalist politician of the period, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, started publishing it on 22 November 1937 (Azikiwe 1994). Zik, (as he was popularly known) who emerged as "the greatest journalist in the country" (Animashaun and Bayagbor 1995) during the World War II years, had edited the *West African Pilot*, a daily penny newspaper, whose publication signaled the inauguration of popular journalism in Nigeria. The newspaper subsequently grew into "a fire-eating and aggressive nationalist paper of the highest order" (Awolowo 1960).

The Daily Service was the ideological and inveterate rival of the *West African Pilot*. It was the organ of the nationalist Nigerian Youth Movement. It was first published in 1938. The doyen of Nigerian journalism, Mr. Ernest Sisei Ikoli, who was also Vice President of the Nigerian Youth Movement, edited the paper from inception in 1938 to 1943. Obviously, the competition posed to the *Pilot* by the *Daily Service* did not go down well with Azikiwe, who subsequently opposed Ikoli's nomination as President of the Nigerian Youth Movement (Sklar 1983), a development that engulfed the Movement in a deep schism from which it never fully recovered. *The Daily Service*, organ of the movement took up the cudgel against

Dr. Azikiwe and the *West African Pilot*, whose meteoric rise had threatened Yoruba ascendancy, especially given Azikiwe's withdrawal of his membership and of the support of the *Pilot* from the NYM. As from 1943, Mr. Samuel Ladoke Akintola, the former Baptist Academy, Lagos schoolteacher, who at independence in 1960 became the Premier of Nigeria's Western Region, edited the *Daily Service*, whose anti-Zik editorial stance became intensified and derived its propelling force from the Yoruba remnants of the Movement's conviction that Azikiwe deliberately destroyed the NYM to pave way for his emergence on the national political firmament. Consequently, the penny *Daily Service* reserved its most acerbic criticism for Azikiwe and his group of newspapers up to and even after the Second World War (Osuntokun 1984).

The third of the newspapers was the *Nigerian Daily Times*, which was published in June 1926 by European and Nigerian businessmen, including Mr. Ikoli its foundation editor. Except for the expatriate, Mr. H.A.C.M. Bates who acted as General Manager and its editor in chief for a brief period, the paper had Nigerian editors including Mr. Ayodele Lijadu who occupied the editorial chair between 1941 and 1946, when he joined the colonial civil service as Assistant Director of Information (Jose 1987). This notwithstanding, the *Nigerian Daily Times* in all situations tended to support the government in power, with the hope of providing a stable political climate for its business to thrive. Its attempt to steer a neutral political cause was thus suspect. For, while it failed to publish pungent articles with a nationalist fervor, it never criticized the government or the expatriate community, a tendency which exposed it to much credibility problem (Mordi 1994).

Indeed the newspapers, in sinking their differences in support of war efforts, provided a leeway for the government to encourage more sacrifices towards winning the war. The government which held the view that "as regards munitions, help in this direction was obviously beyond the power of Nigeria" (Bourdillon 1940), thus capitalized on the goodwill and unanimity of the press, which seemed to sink the political differences of its owners and publishers in support of war efforts to get the press to inaugurate the war fund scheme. Not surprisingly, the *Nigerian Daily Times* hinged its announcement of the launch of the Nigeria Win the War on the

fact that government was gratified to find that Nigerians were still genuinely anxious to “give further and practical proof of loyalty to the British Empire” as suggested by articles and letters in the daily press. It conveyed the official view that more satisfaction from the scheme would be derived if it took the form of a “gift of money to be devoted to the purchase of some definite instrument of war, for example a tank or an aeroplane”, especially if the Fund could “be sponsored by local effort as soon as possible.”

The *Nigerian Daily Times*, in effect, provided a leeway for the government, by inaugurating the fund, whose target it set as a tank, which cost only £20,000. However, the *Daily Times* conscious of its perception as a pro-imperialist organ which posed a credibility problem capable of working against the success of the scheme, alluded to the editorial opinions of the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Service* as justification for its inauguration. In commending the win the war fund to the “wholehearted and generous support of our readers”, the *Nigerian Daily Times* (June 1940) left no one in doubt that it assumed responsibility for the scheme whose inauguration already had the blessings of the nationalist press as well as the government of Nigeria.

Implicit in the background to the launch of the war fund was a healthy collaboration for work and war between two ordinarily hostile forces. In the wake of losses in men and material incurred by the Allies the Nigerian press, especially after Dunkirk, offered concrete suggestions of ways in which Nigerians could assist the colonial power in the defeat of Nazism. The governor obviously drew strength from such friendly gestures from the nationalist press, which thereby received

official encouragement to implement its suggestion. To demonstrate the importance and urgency attached to the fund and the expectation that all sections of Nigeria should subscribe to it, the *Nigerian Daily Times* published the first list of subscribers and the initial subscription of £477.10. Contributors included the governor, the administrative bureaucracy, the private sector and individuals, Nigerians, Europeans and Levantines, alike. Such was the mood of the times which pointed to the success of the scheme (Table 1).

The Press and the Sustenance of Popular Support for the Scheme

Publication of details of subscriptions achieved the desired effect. It engendered confidence in the transparency of the scheme as well as a competitive spirit among various classes in the society. Besides, the publication of the target sum of £20,000 only, gave the impression that the task was light, and Nigeria could afford it. Indeed the Win the War Fund was generally well received by Nigerians, who enthusiastically supported and generously donated to it. Such was the enthusiasm that by the end of September 1940, barely three months after the inauguration of the Fund, the £25,000 mark had been hit, and a new target of £50,000 unilaterally set by the *Nigerian Daily Times* (September 1940), which assured subscribers that it had cabled £25,000 to the SOS for the purchase of aircraft and urged Nigerians to double their efforts towards its attainment. The *Nigerian Daily Times* must have gauged popular enthusiasm for the Fund, from the increasing subscriptions mailed to its General Manager, to be high, and determined to exploit the Nigerian positive disposition to give to their utmost in shifting the Fund’s initial target. It would not have made economic sense to wind up the scheme when the people were still willing to donate to it. Nigerians, therefore, accepted the new target with equanimity. A healthy competition developed as each province and/or groups strove with fanfare to out-subscribe the others.

A healthy competition characterized Nigerian contributions to the scheme as communities, individuals and groups adopted diverse methods to raise money towards the success of the Win the War Fund. Committees were set up to coordinate fund raising efforts and proceeds were forwarded in regular installments to the *Nigerian Daily Times*. Raffle draws and dances were also

Table 1: List of initial contributors to the Nigeria win the war fund

Identity of contributor	Amount contributed		
	£	S	d
His Excellency	100	0	0
J.N. Zarpas and Co.	251	0	0
Administrative staff of the colony	50	0	0
Irvin and Bonnar	25	0	0
The Hon. A. Alakija and Mrs. Alakija	21	0	0
E.F.A. Tomlinson, Esq.	20	0	0
Dr. & Mrs. Ellis	5	0	0
A. Le Mare, Esq.	5	0	0
B. Papadopulos, Esq.	1	10	0
Total	477	10	0

Source: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 17 June 1940, p.1.

organized to boost contributions to the fund (Table 2).

Besides, organized labor unions and Native Administrations, including Emirates and District colonial communities actively contributed to the scheme in a manner that engendered and sustained a competitive spirit. Above all, Europeans either as social units or distinct racial groups identified with the scheme by sending their contributions to the *Nigerian Daily Times* which, by publishing all such contributions on the same column as Nigerians' contributions practically demonstrated the unity of the human race in the fight to overthrow Nazism (Table 2).

Unique contributions from the traditional aristocracy of Northern Nigeria, however, deserve some mention. Emirs of the Northern provinces made extra contributions reflecting the varied sizes of their Emirates' resources and salaries of the Native Authorities to the fund. The contributions, which were made on a monthly basis, constituted five percent of each Emir's salary to the fund since its inauguration. In the regularity and scale of such subscriptions, the Northern Emirates were unique in their contributions which tended to suggest official inducement. Yet the centralized structure of the Sokoto Caliphate in which authority issued from the Caliph, the religious inclination of the people and above all the close

alliance between the colonial overlords and the Northern elite largely account for this unique support for the fund (Table 3).

Contributions from Eastern Nigeria, unlike the North, reflected the diffuse political structure of the Eastern provinces and the individualism of the people. Women are also mentioned in a distinct contribution, just as groups of African workers, featured prominently in their regular contributions to the scheme. What thus becomes certain is that, despite the absence of a concrete record detailing percentage of contributions to the scheme on the bases of nationality, ethnicity or race, Nigerians of all classes, contributed over 70 percent of the fund. For instance, specific mention of European contributions by June 1943 when £135,927 16^s 8^d had been subscribed amounted to only £52, 10 shillings and 2 pence, or 27 percent. Given the enormous privileges enjoyed by Europeans in Nigeria at the time and the rising cost of living vis-à-vis acute unemployment and war time exertions of Nigerians, the huge sacrifices represented by the above figures come into bold relief. In general, it could be said that traditional rulers led their subjects by example and thereby facilitated mass mobilization in support of the Fund. So effective was the mobilization that by mid-1943 the new target of £50,000, which was set by the fourth quarter of 1940 had been more than two times

Table 2: Contributions to the win the war fund, August 1940

Contributor	Amount contributed		
	£	S	d
Abeokuta Committee Win the War Fund (2nd Contribution)	1021	3	4
Ilesha NA & People (1st Contribution).	178	9	4
Benue Province Europeans	63	19	6
Benin European Club	50	19	6
Port-Harcourt Club proceeds of the Mrs. W. Mac Donald's Nightly Raffle	36	4	0
Benue Province Africans	25	7	0
African Staff British West African Timber Co. Ltd.	18	0	0
Nigerian Union of Teachers	6	5	0
Royal Hotel Dances (4th Contribution).	8	0	0
Alhaji Lagos	1	17	6
Sokoto Emirate	5,216	11	1
Gwandu Emirate	885	7	1
Yauri Emirate	40	0	0
Illo District	33	8	1
Sokoto Province	9610	3	7
Emir, chiefs and Peoples of Zaria Province	1674	3	7
Chiefs and People of Bauchi Province (Further Contribution)	294	0	0
Buea, Proceeds of dance at Residency	140	1	5
Benue Province (including £100 from Anonymous Benue No. 2)	125	0	0
The Club Hitler Club (1st installment)	100	0	0
Total Subscriptions to the Fund	79,936	5	3

Sources: *Nigerian Daily Times* 31 October 1940, p.1, 18 September 1941, p.1., 27 August 1940, p.5

Table 3: Monthly contributions to the war fund by emirs of the northern provinces, 1942

Identity of contributor Emir	Amount contributed normal monthly contribution		
	£	S	d
Abuja	2	5	0
Adamawa	8	6	8
Agaie	1	0	0
Bauchi	8	6	8
Bida	8	6	8
Biu	3	0	0
Borno	25	0	0
Bussa	1	0	0
Dubai	1	5	0
Fika	5	5	0
Gombe	5	0	0
Gorgoram	3	5	0
Gumel	10	0	0
Gwandu	5	0	0
Hadeija	2	0	0
Igbira	9	10	0
Ilorin	1	7	6
Jamaare	1	10	0
Kaiama	1	0	0
Kano	35	0	0
Katagum	5	0	0
Katsina	19	3	4
Kazaure	4	3	4
Keffi	1	6	6
Kontagora	3	15	0
Lafiagi	1	13	4
Lapai	1	10	0
Misau	3	0	0
Muri	8	10	0
Nassarawa	1	10	0
Pategi	1	0	0
Shendam	1	10	0
Sokoto	30	0	0
Wamba	12	6	0
Yauri	2	7	6
Zaria	10	0	0

Source: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 24 April 1942, p.6.

exceeded. Indeed every step was taken to sustain popular enthusiasm for the fund (Tables 4-5).

It would appear that Nigerians were deceived at the inception of the fund to believe that only one aeroplane or a tank which cost not more than twenty-five thousand pounds was the target of the scheme. Hints that the Fund had been inaugurated to purchase many tanks, aeroplanes, instead of one tank or an aeroplane as announced by the *Nigerian Daily Times* had emerged a few days after the inauguration of the scheme. The British Resident in Oyo Province, Mr. A.R.A. Dickins had given this indication when he addressed the Ibadan Native Administration Council meeting. He had informed the meeting that the Fund was established to finance the

purchase of “tanks, aeroplanes and ammunition for the British Empire” (Extracts 1940). Besides, the Information Officer at the Nigerian Secretariat, Mr. D.C. Fletcher (1940:) had drawn the attention of Residents to the fact that even though the *Nigerian Daily Times* inaugurated the Fund, it was the Governor’s desire that the Fund be promptly and generously supported. The Information Officer had further directed that the scheme be given the widest publicity possible. Accordingly, residents across Nigeria alerted all their subordinate officers, notably District Officers to comply with the directive. These in turn attended Native Administration Council Meetings, where they interacted with Chiefs and Elders of communities who, in turn, emphasized the importance of the Fund to their communities.

There is nothing to suggest that Nigerians were thereby compelled to donate to the scheme. Rather, the press and government, to stimulate a healthy competition in the people for donation to the Fund, and to get Nigerians committed to its success, devised ingenious ways, which made Nigerians to believe and come to accept that the Fund was theirs. They, therefore, constantly inundated the Nigerian Secretariat with suggestions for its sustenance and success, suggestions which received adequate publicity in the press, especially the *Nigerian Daily Times*.

One such ingenious suggestion came from a certain Mrs. M.C.M. Bridges of Calabar. Her suggestion curiously titled YSEULT BRIDGES WAR FUND SCHEME was documented and forwarded to the Acting Chief Secretary to the Colonial Government of Nigeria, who made copies available to all residents in Nigeria for implementation. The kernel of the suggestion, whose implementation would amount to an additional poll tax on Nigerians, was that if the Win the War Fund were to achieve a resounding success, a principal source to be tapped remained the mass of the people in Nigeria. According to the document:

If this source were tapped, the result would be fully worthy of Nigeria. If every man, woman and child of Nigeria’s twenty million inhabitants gave two pence half penny, the amount realized would be more than £200,000. This would be enough to pay for more than a full squadron of the latest fighter aeroplanes, or half a squadron of the latest bomber aeroplanes. The aeroplanes would be a gift from the people of Nigeria to His Majesty the King. They would go into battle

Table 4: Contributions to the fund, 1940-1942

Contributor	Amount contributed		
	£	S	d
Owerri Province Sundry Collections, Aug/Sept 1940	2,000	0	0
Women of Ihite, Owerri town, Orlu District (Voluntary Collections) Nov. 1940	3	8	10
A lady from the Eastern Provinces: proceeds from sales of Artistic productions.	50	0	0
Education staff Buea, (March Contribution)	5	6	10
Mallam Saidi: Buea	0	3	0
Marine African staff, Onitsha (March Contribution)	0	6	6
Marine African staff, Onitsha (January Contribution)	0	6	6
Marine African staff, Onitsha (February Contribution)	0	6	6
G.E. Charles, Provincial Administration Degema	0	1	1
Football/Dance Organized By Police Eket	6	4	9
People of Ogoni Tribal Area, Opobo	135	0	0
Staff of Ogwashi-Uku Government School (February Contribution)	0	9	9
Staff of Ogwashi-Uku Government School (March Contribution)	0	9	9
Prison Staff, Afikpo for March 1942	0	0	3
S.A. Obi Esq. Government School, Afikpo	0	1	0
Staff Education Department Owerri Province, Port Harcourt	0	16	4
Staff of the Education Office, Port Harcourt (February Contribution)	0	7	6
Staff of Government School, Bonny for March	0	16	4
Staff of the Education Office, Port Harcourt (March Contribution)	0	5	0
Education office, Eket, March 1942		5	11
E.E. Ekpenyong Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	2	6
E.O. Ita, Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	2	6
J.A. Agbuchen, Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	2	6
S. Uku Esq. Education Department, Abak		1	6
O.R.U. Essien Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	0	6
H.I. Acholem, Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	0	6
P.K. Inyama, Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	0	6
I. Ogbonnaya, Esq. Education Department, Abak	0	6	6
Total	104,559	9	7

Sources: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 17 Oct 1940, p.6, 12 Dec. 1940, p.6, 1 May 1942, p.3.

Table 5: Contribution to the fund, June 1943

Identity of contributor	Amount contributed		
	£	S	d
Abakiliki Division	2	12	6
Ogoja Division:			
Chief Ekpo of Ukelle North	10	0	0
Irruan Clan	1	8	0
Nkim Elders	0	12	0
Osokun Elders	1	15	0
Mbube Priest Chiefs	2	0	0
Nkum Elders	3	0	0
Akaju Elders	0	9	3
Northern Ukelle Elders	7	10	0
Obubra Division:			
Egup Ipa Clan	8	17	0
Bahumunu Clan Council	5	0	0
Total Amount	135,927	16	8
Subscribed to date			

Source: *Nigerian Daily Times*, 8 June 1943, p.1

against the Germans bearing the name of Nigeria as Nigeria's contribution to the war effort of a United Empire (Acting Chief Secretary 1940).

Another peculiar fund raising activity, which

deserves to be mentioned, was the collecting and cracking of palm kernels competition among school children in Nigeria. This had been initiated at a time when the low price paid for palm kernels had led to the abandonment of the economic activity by the women folk. In Nigeria's Mid-West, among schools in Ishan, (District Officer Ishan FIS 1/9) a monthly prize was awarded to the school which cracked the most kernels per pupil. School pupils resorted to buying kernels from the markets in order to swell their school totals. By the end of the third quarter of 1943, over £100 had been realized and donated to the fund by Ishan schools from the kernels cracking competition. In Warri Province (FIS 1/9, Vol. II 1943), however, the Ishan approach was abused. A so-called Scholar's Council imposed fines of additional cups of kernel on pupils for breaches of discipline.

Voluntary or Compulsory Support for the Win the War Fund?

What is intriguing is why colonial Nigerians

would willingly, as it were, sacrifice so much towards the success of the Nigeria Win the War Fund. The answer is not far to seek. To be sure, the available evidence does not suggest that Nigerians were overtly compelled to contribute in their diverse ways to the success of the fund. In the circumstances of colonial rule with Nigeria as a subject territory, the contributions could well qualify as “tributes”, “extracted by Britain from Nigeria during the war” as the USSR would suggest (Academy of Sciences 1968). This view accords with the thrust of German propaganda which portrayed Africans as being harshly treated and compelled against their will to contribute to Britain’s win the war efforts generally. A leading authority has, however, explained African responses in this circumstance in relation to the Nigeria Win the War Fund quite aptly:

Germans broadcast that African contributions to the ‘Win the War Fund’ were obtained by force, to which the Sultan of Sokoto replied. ‘That is a lie and I would also like to ask Hitler whether it is by force that we gather in our mosques and schools and offer up prayers from our heart, day and night, for the success of the British armies and the downfall of His Majesty’s enemies (Crowder 1976).

It is thus more rewarding to view Nigerian contributions as voluntary, even if the fear of the unknown partly sustained such contributions. In this connection, the voluntary contributions could be ascribed to five main reasons. First, Nigerians were apprehensive of any possibility of colonial domination by Nazi Germany with its ideology of racism. In the circumstance, they chose the old enemy with whom they were familiar, Britain instead of Germany, whose utterances foreshadowed doom for them in the event of Britain’s defeat. Their ready response to calls for substantial contributions, including subscribing generously to numerous war funds was their demonstration of a preference for British rule (Whitely 1945).

Second and a corollary of this explanation is that British war propaganda seemed to have paid off on Nigerians. The colonial government seemed to capitalize on Nigerians’ loathe of German rule to mount sustained propaganda drives in which it urged all hands to be on deck to bring about the defeat of Hitler. By contributing to the purchase of war equipment, therefore, Nigerians no doubt believed they were contributing their own quota towards the speedy defeat of Hitler

and Nazism. While the effectiveness or otherwise of British war-time propaganda in Nigeria must await a detailed study, it can be tentatively said that the Nigerian press contributed to its dissemination and credibility. Such propaganda portrayed Germany as the aggressor, which the whole world hated, while portraying Britain as fighting Hitler with the backing of all humanity. German aggression and lawlessness on the eve of World War II certainly disintegrated the system of collective security and tended to justify might as right, even though totalitarian states like Italy and Japan actively deployed similar tactics, thereby casting Britain in the mold of defender of endangered humanity. In fact, frontline nationalists who were also the leading journalists of the period, notably Herbert Macaulay, and Nnamdi Azikiwe lent credence to this position.

For instance, Azikiwe, Nigeria’s most charismatic nationalist journalist and politician of the World War II era, and publisher of the *West African Pilot*, toured towns in the Western and Eastern Provinces and organized football matches, among other activities, to raise fund for war charities. The *Daily Service* and its publishers the Nigerian Youth Movement also encouraged subscriptions to the Fund in diverse ways (Mordi 1994). On his part, Herbert Macaulay the doyen of Nigerian nationalism broadcast to Nigerians, urging their support for the war effort. In one of such broadcasts, he assured that “Victory for Democracy and Freedom for mankind depend on our contributions, and our determination and our loyalty”, and enjoined Nigerians to “rally round the Union Jack” (Ewa 1993).

Third, contributors to the fund sacrificed so much to ensure the success of the scheme and victory for the Allies or the United Nations as they came to be known as from 1942 in the conviction that they were contributing to a worthy and noble cause. It was their expectation that at the end of the hostilities, when the roll of honor was called their names would not be left out. This was the major reason traditional rulers throughout Nigeria encouraged their subjects to support the scheme by all means. As the *Oba* of Benin told the Chiefs and people of Benin City in 1942:

I make this appeal not because the United Nations cannot win the war even if the Benins fail to contribute their quotas to the sum total of the Empire’s war effort...But I do make the appeal so that when the day comes, the great day of victory won by the United Nations the

worthy name of Benin may be mentioned... along with those who have generously and cheerfully contributed to the Empire's war efforts, so that Benins may be able to say with pride 'and we, too, have helped to win the war' (FIS 1/9 1943).

Fourth, the personality of Governor Bourdillon also accounted for Nigerians' contributions to the Win the War Fund. Nigeria's colonial Governor up to 1943, Sir Henry Bernard Bourdillon engendered in them a commitment to give generously. His human understanding, *sympathy, sincerity, frankness, humility and personal touch* in his relations with Nigerians, particularly the educated elite who cherished their relationship with him (Mordi 1994; Azikiwe 1994), and the ease with which he thanked Nigerians publicly for their sacrifice toward the war effort endeared him to them. These sterling qualities of Sir Bourdillon also enkindled in Nigerians the healthy competitive spirit of giving till it hurt, fully sure of being acknowledged by the governor. The governor made regular broadcasts over the Lagos radio diffusion to acknowledge donations and praise the popular enthusiasm for the success of the Fund. In such broadcasts, the governor disclosed the amount realized and how it was expended. In addition, probably feeding on the people's desire for recognition by the "white master" he singled out spectacular donations and fundraising efforts for mention. Even then, no effort or amount was considered too small or meager to deserve his mention and commendation. By so doing, he also publicized fundraising activities in various parts of Nigeria for emulation or adaptation by sundry groups. His broadcast of 23 January 1941 was typical:

Children of the Government School at Abak wrote in sending in "these few pennies from us to the British Government to buy a bomber with which to bomb and defeat Hitler and his wicked agents". Similarly, various group councils in the Nnewi area in Onitsha contributed the sum of £10 each to the win-the-war fund, asking that these amounts should be deducted from their executive salaries. Also, the Nsukka Division of the Onitsha Province raised over £400 for the win-the-war fund. In Ganuwari, in the Plateau Province, the elders of Biron tribe "collected our pennies" and raised nine pounds ten shillings. The win-the-war fund has caught the popular fancy... (Bourdillon 1941).

No doubt, such acknowledgements and commendations from the highest authority in the

land must have served as a morale booster to Nigerians who, in view of the 'Spitfire' aircraft named after their towns and provinces in recognition of their generous donations to the Fund likened it to the well-known self help scheme among Africans.

Fifth, Nigerians, especially the educated elites, expected to be rewarded after the war. The reward obviously was expected to take the form of a gradual transfer of power to Nigerians, which would culminate in self-government. Dr. Azikiwe said as much in his political blueprint for Nigeria in which he outlined a phased transfer of power to Nigerians between 1943 and 1958. The Blueprint had been written and serialized in the *West African Pilot* for the colonial authorities to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what the awakened Nigerian thinks and feels of the Nigeria of tomorrow". This country in view was an "autonomous community, equal in status and in no way subordinate to ... the Mother Country..., and freely associated as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations" (Mordi 1999). In other words, as has been rightly observed, "from all indications African responses seemed to have been determined more by their desire to improve themselves than to please Britain during the war" (Nwabughuogu 1992).

Indeed the contributions of ordinary Nigerians to the win-the-war exertions of Britain in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. In spite of their distance from the theater of war, they appreciated the enormous sacrifices called forth by war. This evoked in them a ready response to the call for increased production of export and other commodities needed for the successful prosecution of the war. As Sir Gerald Whitely (1946) who acted as the Officer Administering Nigeria in 1945 noted, in many other directions, the people of Nigeria supported the war efforts. They made substantial contributions to the war effort, "accepting without demur low prices for their goods, cheerfully accommodating themselves to transport restrictions and to shortage and high cost of imported goods, providing recruits for the services and subscribing generously to numerous war funds", but were disappointed in the realization that their hopes would not materialize immediately after the war (*Daily Service* 1946).

Indeed, the healthy collaboration between the government and the press while the war lasted in the conception and execution of the Nigeria Win the War Fund was remarkable. So much did they

cooperate that the Fund received more than its fair share of publicity of all war funds and war efforts. The weight of responsibility in this regard became too heavy for the General Manager of the *Nigerian Daily Times* to bear, having undertaken at the inception of the Fund to handle all subscription to it. The Government stepped in quietly to save the situation and sustain the continued subscriptions to the Fund. The work of coordination, including receipt of all subscriptions to the Fund was taken over by the Nigerian Secretariat. Such healthy collaboration ensured that the Fund became the success story that it was. By the time it was closed in October 1945, over £150,000 had been realized.

As noted elsewhere, close to £140,000 of this amount had been realized by June 1943. In effect the force that galvanized people for action in favor of the Fund became slack by 1944. The period coincided with the Governorship of Sir Arthur Frederick Richards, who replaced Governor Bourdillon in December 1943 on account of the latter's retirement due to ill-health. Governor Richards, described by fellow Europeans as the 'old sinister' (Pearce 1981), had come to Nigeria from Jamaica, where the record of his relations with the educated elite was abysmal. He came to Nigeria determined to roll back the tide of nationalism. The subsequent struggle for supremacy between Nigeria's modern mass nationalism and the old-style colonial autocracy represented by Sir Arthur Richards obviously took its toll on contributions to and popular enthusiasm for the Nigeria Win the War Fund. The governor had shown scant regard for Nigerian nationalist aspirations by imposing an unpopular constitution on the country, even as he triggered a general strike by Nigerian workers over his refusal to grant wage increases to cushion them from the effects of war-induced hardship and high cost of living index (Coleman 1958; Oyemakinde 1975; Azikiwe 1994).

Nonetheless, the Win the War Fund achieved the objectives for which it was inaugurated. In August 1943, a Mosquito Bomber, named Nigeria was purchased for £20,000. Besides, the Nigerian squadron consisting of aircraft purchased with money contributed by Nigerians to the Win the War Fund was emplaced by April 1942. The planes in the fleet numbering 25 in all, each bearing the name of each of Nigeria's 23 provinces as well as Lagos and Colony were actively engaged in the war and by April 1942 were reported to have

destroyed nearly 50 enemy aircraft. Also in January 1945, 13 Bren gun carriers were bought from the Fund and handed over to the British Ministry of Supply on behalf of Nigeria by His Grace, the Duke of Devonshire at a ceremony attended by Sir Bernard Bourdillon (Public Relations Dept. 1945). Britain, on her part, recorded her appreciation to Nigeria for all the sacrifices and gifts with a gold disc, supplemented by a plaque from the Ministry of Aircraft Production in 1947 (*West Africa* 1945).

CONCLUSION

The Second World War era press in Nigeria had much more than a nuisance value to the colonial regime. It was also constructive and indeed collaborative in the war against Nazism. Also, contrary to prevailing notions, the distance of Nigerians from the theaters of war did not make them indifferent to the war, insensitive to government's appeal for self-sacrifice nor cushion them from the effects of the world conflagration. The press brought home to Nigerians the news and grim implications of the war, and mobilized them to fully support all measures geared towards victory for the Allies. In their support of British war aims, wartime measures and war funds as a result of which they sacrificed so much, they expected some rewards in form of wide ranging reforms and ultimate self government after the war. They faithfully paid their dues, politically, economically and socially but regretted at the end of the war that colonialism had taken them for a ride.

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