

# MAJOR POLITICAL CRISES IN NIGERIA

## CONTENT

1. The Kano Riot of 1953
2. The Eastern Region Constitution Crisis of 1953
3. The Census Crises of 1962/63
4. The Action Group Crisis in Western Region 1962

### **The Kano Riot of 1953**

#### **Causes of the Kano Riot of 1953**

1. A member of the action group in the Federal House of Representatives in 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro moved a motion on the floor of the House that Nigeria should attain self-governance by 1956. The Northern people congress opposed the motion on the ground that the motion should be changed to as soon as practicable this stand was opposed by the AG and the NCNC.
2. The northern delegates were booed and humiliated on the streets of Lagos while returning to their areas after the motion.
3. In anticipation that the proposed amendment would succeed because of the numerical strength of the NPC in the house, members of the NCNC and the AG walked out of the house.
4. Due to the fact that the AG was not comfortable with the views expressed by the NPC, the AG sent a delegation to the north on the need for the motion of self- government to be adopted
5. Another cause of the riot was the planned secession of the northerners if their demands were not met
6. The northerners were against the Igbos for their dominance of the economic activities in the northern part of Nigeria.
7. The southern leaders accused the northerners of trying to extend colonial rule.
8. Riot broke out on the streets of Kano between May 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> in which 36 people lost their lives and about 241 people were wounded.

#### **Implications or Effects of the 1953 Kano Riot**

1. The Riot worsened the bitter relationship between the Northern and southern leaders as they accused one another of sabotage.
2. The riot also showed that only a federal system of government, where each region can develop at their own pace is the only means of holding the country together.
3. The British government discovered that the regions cannot work together as a unit. Therefore Macpherson constitution was reviewed and replaced with Lyttelton constitution.
4. It gave birth to London constitution conference of 1953/54.
5. It led to a walking alliance between the AG and the NCNC. Known as the united progressive Grand

Alliance.

6. The crises led to 8 point demand by the NPC to the colonial government before they could return to the house of Representative. The 8 point demands are:

### **The Eastern Region Constitution Crisis of 1953**

In its meeting held at Enugu on the night of January 28, 1953, the NCNC parliamentary committee requested all its nine regional ministers to resign so that the Regional Executive could be reshuffled. At this meeting all nine regional ministers did sign and address their resignation notices to the Lieutenant-General; But six hours later, six of the ministers who apparently learnt that their names were not included in the new list, sent letters to the Lt. Governor withdrawing their resignation notices. Later, the same morning, the notices of the resignation of all the nine regional ministers were brought to the Lt. Gov. But it became apparent that the withdrawals were received before the notices of resignation were actually handed in.

The NCNC charged that, since these six ministers had under their hand actually resigned their seats even though they withdrew those resignations later, the Governor had no constitutional right to allow them to remain in office. Besides, the party maintained that these ministers had lost the confidence of the party on whose platform they had accepted office and therefore were not properly qualified to continue to serve on the Regional Executive Council. The minister, on the other hand, contended that they had been its majority into an 'opposition' and defeated every bill that was brought up for debate in the House. And for the three months that this constitutional controversy linger, the Eastern regional government was virtually paralyzed. The situation was only saved by the Lt. Governor resorting to Reserve Powers to decree an appropriation for the running of government services. It was not, however, until May 6, 1953, that the Eastern House of Assembly was dissolved by an Amendment decree of Royal Instrument. Subsequently, the NCNC was, after a general election, overwhelmingly returned to power with the Eastern regional government this time headed by the NCNC national President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe.

### **The Census Crises of 1962/63**

One of the crises that threatened to tear Nigeria apart was the census crises of 1962 to 1963. After the 1952/53 census, 312 seats in the House of Representatives were allocated, giving the north 174 seats, East 73 seats, West 62 seat and Lagos 3 seats. Thus the North controlled a majority in the house with the number of seats greater than that of the south combined. The east and west felt uncomfortable in the arrangement and believed the north was not so populous and that allocation on reliable population figures would redress the situation. The census of May 1962 was then considered a solution. The result of the census showed the population of both the East and West increasing over the 1952/53 figures by about 70 percent each while the North increased by only 30 percent. The results were regarded to be largely unreliable. This led to their cancellation after the federal parliament failed to sit for three days.

Another census was conducted in November 1963 and when the results were released in February 1964, the North had 29.8 million, the East 12.4 million and the West (including the Mid-West) 12.8 million. The Northern and Western Region leaders accepted the figures as correct. However, the government of Eastern and Mid-Western

Region as well as many educated Southerners rejected the result, some by violent protests. The Prime Minister, Sir. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared the results as satisfactory. The Eastern Region government contested the results at the Supreme Court, asking for its nullification, an action which was dismissed, leaving the 1963 census figures the reference points for some three decades afterwards.

### **The Action Group Crisis in Western Region 1962**

Chief Obafemi Awolowo left the premiership of the Western Region in 1959, to contest federal elections to the House of Representative, hoping he would become Prime Minister if his party won the election. Chief S.L. Akintola then became premier. The Action Group however lost the federal election and Awolowo became opposition leader while remaining as party chairman with Akintola as his deputy. Later, there was a personality clash between the two leaders.

#### **Causes of the Action Group Crisis of 1962/63**

1. There was personality clash between the two principal actors, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the party leader and the opposition leader in the Federal House of Representatives and Chief S.L Akintola who was the deputy leader and the Premier of the Western Region.
2. There were differences in ideology and tactics pursued by the two leaders. Akintola suggested the formation of national government with the NPC but Awolowo refused.
3. There was also the fear expressed by Awolowo that Akintola planned to supplant him as the party leader.
4. Awolowo wanted to be consulted before any major decision affecting the people of the Western Region is taken which Akintola objected to.
5. Awolowo also accused Akintola of making a secret deal with Tafawa Balewa so that Akintola will support Balewa to become the president when Nigeria became a republic.
6. Their disagreement reached a breaking point in Feb. 1962 during the Jos convention of the party. S. L. Akintola and Ayo Rosiji who was then the General Secretary walked out of the convention when it was clear they would be expelled from the party with their supporters.
7. Majority of the party members supported the expulsion motion and a vote of no confidence was passed on him.

#### **Effects of the Action Group Crisis of 1962/1963**

1. The Action Group (AG) was factionalized into two groups with Awolowo on one side and Akintola on the other side.
2. The Governor of the Western Region, Sir Adesoji Aderemi heeded the call to remove Chief S.L Akintola as the premier of western region.
3. Akintola's removal was declared null and void by the Supreme Court.
4. Chief Akintola was reinstated as the premier of Western region in 1963 and on returning to power, he formed a new party known as the United Progressive Party (UPP).
5. Sir Adesoji Aderemi was dismissed as the Governor of the Western Region by the Federal Government.
6. Following the breakdown of law and order, the Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region and appointed Dr. Majekodunmi as the administrator of the region.

7. Sam Ikoku was appointed as the new secretary of the Action Group to replace Ayo Rosiji while Alhaji D. S. Adegbenro succeeded S.L. Akintola as the premier of the Western region.
8. A commission of enquiry was set up by the federal government headed by Dr. G.B Coker and it was discovered that party members embezzled government funds.
9. The crisis led to the trial of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and some of his close associates for treasonable felony, for which reason they were eventually jailed.
10. The crisis was one of the remote causes of the breakdown of law and order in the Western Region.

#### EVALUATION

1. Vividly discuss the Kano Riot of 1953.
2. Discuss the Census Crisis of 1962/63.