

Africa Report by Douglas DeGroot

Nigeria's constitution targeted

The opposition party would abolish the strong central government and promote ethnic and regional conflict.

The upcoming 1983 elections in Nigeria, the first since the 1979 election that led to the return to civilian rule, are being seized on as an opportunity to remove the republican core from the Nigerian constitution.

Any attempt to undermine the Nigerian constitution is an immediate cause for concern for anyone who appreciates Nigeria's strategic significance for Africa as a whole.

For, in a period when economies in Africa are generally deteriorating or collapsing, a Nigerian development success could lead the way out of Africa's condemnation to the role of mere providers of raw materials.

Nigeria has roughly one-quarter of Africa's population, and it has oil, ranking fifth in OPEC oil production prior to the present worldwide oil glut which has driven down production. The government is trying to parlay its large population and oil wealth into the makings of an industrialized country. Oil-producing countries with large populations, such as Nigeria and Indonesia, have been targeted for destabilization by spokesmen for pro-IMF financial networks.

Therefore, recent reports in the *New Nigerian*, a Kaduna, Nigeria daily, that plans are afoot to bring in a British-style parliamentary system, deserve attention.

According to the *New Nigerian*, an alliance of opposition parties, the Progressive Party Alliance (PPA), is working on a plan to take power from the Nigeria National Party (NPN) of President Shehu Shagari. The NPN is

the only party in Nigeria which is not limited to a particular ethnic or regional political base.

The PPA is basically a vehicle being used by Chief Obafemi Awolowo to gain power in Nigeria. Awolowo is the head of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), which is based in Yoruba territory in southwestern Nigeria, and led an unsuccessful campaign against Shagari in the presidential election in 1979. In the early 1960s, before the military took power, Awolowo was jailed for treason. Other anti-NPN parties and factions are also part of the loose PPA alliance.

The plan that the *New Nigerian* warned about calls for Awolowo to be the PPA presidential candidate in the 1983 elections. If he wins the election, the plan calls for him to amend the Nigerian constitution, creating the position of Prime Minister. He would then resign as president, and let Nnamdi Azikiwe become figurehead president (as his payoff for joining the operation). Awolowo himself would become Prime Minister, from which position he would run the country in a more decentralized fashion. This would please the ethnic-tribal and regionally based groups who are unhappy with the impingement of a strong central government on their identity.

The Nigerian constitution is a key factor which makes the industrialization of Nigeria possible. The Nigerian constitution, when it was drawn up prior to the ending of 13 years of military rule in 1979, was explicitly modeled on that of the United States, es-

tablishing a strong central government to direct vigorous development, in which all segments of the population could participate and benefit.

Manipulated regional and ethnic conflict and the resulting violence led to the seizure of power by the military in 1966, and the destructive and murderous civil war in the late 1960s.

Nigeria is vulnerable to the machinations of Awolowo and his backers only because of the economic crisis now confronting Nigeria. Oil income is the backbone of Nigeria's development strategy, accounting for 80 percent of federal revenues and 90 percent of the country's export income.

Nigeria was targeted as the weak link in OPEC, the country most likely to cut its prices below the OPEC agreed rates. The British brought enormous pressure on Nigeria by lowering the price on North Sea oil and dumping oil on the Rotterdam spot market, forcing down the price on the high-grade North Sea oil, which is of the same quality as Nigerian light sweet crude.

As a result of the glut and the resultant soft market, Nigerian production dropped from an expected 2 million barrels per day to about 600,000 barrels per day, and has now leveled off at about 1.3 million bpd, a rate subsequently agreed on within OPEC.

The drop in oil production threatens the \$125 billion five-year development plan launched by Shagari. If the prospects for development which motivated the population to put Shagari in office are not forthcoming, the regionally based parties now loosely gathered in the PPA will have a better chance to undermine Shagari's support by claiming they are not getting its just share of the oil wealth from the federal government. It was aggravation of such issues which resulted in the civil war.