

## A Critique of the Supply of Foodstuffs to His Majesty's Forces in World War II, 1939-1945.

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### Abstract

World War II which lasted from 1939 to 1945 is a significant part of colonial Nigeria. It marked a turning point in the relationship between African countries and their colonizers. Nigeria was a major ally to Britain and the imperial government during the war as is seen through Nigeria's contribution to the war effort and her staunch involvement which included funds, raw materials, manpower, and support. The contributions of Nigeria and her people were made possible through the actions and activities of notable figures including traditional rulers, the educated elite, and various groups of British loyalists. Nigerians lent a helping hand to fight the war which included services such as toiling in mines, construction work, joining the army, and serving as ad hoc staff. Nigerians remained resilient in their pledge of allegiance. Christian Church leaders admonished their followers to remain British loyalists as did the traditional religious worshippers who continually showed their loyalty and support for colonial government. Nigeria's major contribution to the war effort was through the surplus production and export of foodstuff aimed at feeding the imperial armed forces alongside the general populace which resulted in food shortage. The production of food met a decline due to the lack of improvement in farm technology and insufficient manpower caused by the mass deployment of young men to the war front. As a result of this, there was an escalation in the prices of foodstuff as well as a decrease in food production, thereby giving room for black markets, thus preventing farmers and traders from making a profit.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Second World War, Foodstuffs, Black market, Britain, and Nigeria.

### Introduction

... we (the British) have been forced to enter into hostilities not only to honour our pledges to friends but to secure the survival of good faith and liberty among civilized peoples.<sup>1</sup>

The Second World War (1939 – 45) was a monumental human tragedy. Like all the imperial nations caught up in the war, Britain was drawn into the war when she rejected Hitler's peace offers. She was only willing to make peace if Hitler gave up all his conquests. This was the beginning of the *Blitzkrieg*— the aerial bombing of London and other British cities which continued sporadically throughout the war and caused heavy civilian casualties.<sup>2</sup>

The Second World War merged originally two separate drives for spheres of influence into one conflict. One drive began with Hitler's war with Britain and France over Poland, while the second drive for empire began with Japan's penetration of China. From Hitler's attack on the European powers, the Japanese profited by extending their control over a large part of the East Asian mainland and the islands of the Southwest Pacific, including the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines. By the end of 1941, the German, Japanese and Italian drives for empire and spheres of influence had converged to make World War II.<sup>3</sup> To this end, the war has been described as the final crisis of European global dominance.<sup>4</sup> It marked a turning point in the twentieth-century world culminating in the “end of the empire” and the emergence of two new Superpowers, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the third World countries as separate blocs.<sup>5</sup> World War II united the people of the world in one vast, terrible, human endeavour. Countries from

every continent were involved in the conflict as battlefields were scattered around the globe.<sup>6</sup> It was fought by 56 nations and 50 million lives making it the worst war in history.<sup>7</sup>

It changed Nigeria and indeed, all other West African territories from colonial backwaters into strategic areas of importance to the allied conduct of the war. At the outbreak of the war, the most important task for the British government was to mobilise economic and manpower resources. This monumental task affected the whole range of economic life and had to be reorganized both in Britain and in the colonial territories to meet the war emergency, particularly due to the acute shortage of consumer imports and the abrupt closure of many export markets in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The move towards the coordination of economic policies transformed the *laissez-faire* attitude of the British government to one of increasing control of and intervention in the country of Nigeria.<sup>9</sup>

Early in 1939, the increasing possibility of war prompted the consideration of strategic measures to be taken in Nigeria. The Director of Agriculture had anticipated that the Mediterranean Sea route might be closed and that there might be an urgent demand for the country's surplus products at short notice. As a corollary, this meant that Nigeria should become self-supporting and even aim for surplus food production to assist the imperial forces.<sup>10</sup> When war broke out in 1939, important European markets were almost immediately closed to West African cocoa.<sup>11</sup>

To make Nigeria self-sufficient, various aspects of economic control were introduced, particularly, when imports of even basic commodities into Nigeria were drastically curtailed by the conditions of war.<sup>12</sup> As the war progressed, wartime production needs necessarily changed. However, the main targets set for the colonies included the following: the participation in general blockade measures against Germany; the increase of exports of foodstuffs and raw materials to Britain and her allies; the organization of import controls and shipping programmes on a war basis; the adoption of

financial measures, including taxation, price control, Cost of Living Allowances (C.O.L.A) etc. to curb possible inflationary pressures; the increase of local production and other essentials for local consumption to meet shortages of imported goods, particularly due to the effects of shipping difficulties on both import and export trades around the globe as a result of the rising tempo of war activity. There was also the adoption of relief measures to meet special difficulties for staple export industries.<sup>13</sup>

### **Nigeria's Contribution to the War Effort**

World War II was a critical time in Nigerian colonial history, fundamentally altering relations between African colonies and their European masters.<sup>14</sup> Nigeria's contribution to the war effort and her involvement as a British colony ranged from money and materials to men and morale. This, it did, in conformance with the bidding of His Majesty, King George VI of Britain at the outbreak of the war on September 3, 1939. His Majesty had called on the peoples of the empire to "stand calmly, firm and united in this time of trial".<sup>15</sup> Nigeria rose to the occasion. The Governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon affirmed, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration that "there are no more loyal people in the whole of the British Empire than Nigerians".<sup>16</sup> More than half a million Nigerians rendered services directly connected with the fighting of the war. Over 400,000 of them toiled in the mines in the northern part of the country and at various military construction works in the country, while another 121,000 served as soldiers; many others were drafted into the army where they served as porters, servants, cooks and drivers.<sup>17</sup> Nigerian traditional rulers, market women, workers, school children, and other civilians also contributed financially to various war and humanitarian funds, such as the Nigeria War Relief Fund, the Win-the-War-Fund, the Nigerian Forces Comfort Fund, and Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, etc. Altogether, the colonial government and the people of Nigeria contributed more than a

million pounds sterling to the war.<sup>18</sup>

Western-educated Nigerians assisted the government fund-raising schemes through the organization of social and sports activities such as boxing tournaments, tennis, football matches, film shows, fun fairs, and military exhibitions of aircraft, weapons, and ships.<sup>19</sup> Subscriptions to the Win-the-War funds were obtained from associations, religious bodies, commercial firms, townships, school children and the peasantry. Civil servants and other workers sometimes enrolled for monthly deductions from their salaries beginning in September 1939 and continuing to the end of the war. When the Win-the-War Fund was launched, some individual donors had asked that on contributing £5,000, a spitfire bomber be made to bear their names; however, in July 1941, the Secretary of the State for the colonies advised that Nigeria should provide £100,000 to equip a complete squadron of 20 spitfire bombers. Nigeria's contribution at this time was £83,000. Thus, a group in Lagos formed a "Club Hitler" to help raise the £17,000 balance.

Traditional rulers often led the subscription lists in their communities. For example, the Alake of Abeokuta, Oba Ladapo Ademola, on behalf of the Egba Council, donated £250.<sup>20</sup> Also, on the advice of the Sultan of Sokoto, the Emirs of the Northern Provinces allowed a deduction of 5% of their salaries for the duration of the war.<sup>21</sup> The following represents a summary of collections in the Bauchi Province of Northern Nigeria up to the end of 1944:

i. Emirs' contribution to war cost	£1307.13.4
ii. Win-the-War Fund	4762.18.0
iii. Nigerian War Relief Fund	5144. 0.5
iv. Nigeria Troops Comfort Fund	137. 5.4
v. Red Cross and Poppy Day Collections	171.15.11
vi. Wharf Inn Lagos	
	<u>50. 0.0</u>
	<u>£11573.13.0</u> <sup>22</sup>

Another important segment of the Win-the-War Fund was the Savings Certificates Scheme. In September 1945, it had yielded £559,242 – a substantial amount of money. In the Niger Provinces the following Savings Certificates were sold:

I. Bida Division	£3134
ii. Kontagora	£1194
iii. Minna	£1201
iv. Abuja Division	£1143
	<u>£6672</u> <sup>23</sup>

Some Nigerians, in addition to these, gave interest-free war-time loans to the British government to the tune of £44,000,<sup>24</sup> of which Alhaji Mohammadu Dikko C.B.E., the new Emir of Katsina in 1944, had renewed the £1,000 interest-free loan to the British colonial government made by his father.<sup>25</sup> Also, £847 of War Savings Certificates were sold by the Katsina Native Treasury while members of the 'Club Hitler' club contributed £109 to war funds.<sup>26</sup> Suffice it to say that the decision to raise funds in aid of the war was that of the British Colonial government in Nigeria and not that of Nigerians. However, the people's reaction to the war effort allows the general support of the colonial authorities by the people of the colonies, it should not be seen as free will devoid of gentle persuasion by the colonial government. It was at a meeting of notables, presided over by the Governor, that it was unanimously decided to organize a Nigeria War Relief Fund, at the commencement of the war.<sup>27</sup>

The Nigerian elite - some of whom were educated in Britain or honoured with British titles – and most traditional rulers, professed their loyalty to the colonial government. The traditional rulers knew that a show of loyalty to the Empire was important, for their tenure of office depended on doing the wishes of those in authority. Oba Falolu of Lagos, on September 5, 1939, sent the earliest messages of loyalty to Britain. In his letter, he sought "to assure His Majesty and the British government of our unswerving loyalty to the British throne, and our readiness to do all that is needful in support of a cause which we

believe to be just.”<sup>28</sup> The Sultan of Sokoto, the Northern Emirs and the Chiefs, also reaffirmed their allegiance to His Majesty. They were induced to place a large proportion of their reserve funds and made to contribute considerable donations from their private purses to the government.<sup>29</sup>

The Nigerian people also prayed for the success of the British Armed Forces. In the Northern Provinces, the people gathered in mosques and schools and offered prayers for the success of the British and the downfall of His Majesty's enemies.<sup>30</sup> Christian Church leaders charged their adherents to be loyal to Britain.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, traditional religious worshippers showed their loyalty and support. In September 1939, Yoruba *Ifa* priests in Lagos offered sacrifices to their oracles and assured the Commissioner of the Colonies of victory for Britain and her Allies. In Benin, the traditional priests did a similar thing in November 1944 when they cursed Hitler and prayed for His Majesty, Winston Churchill – the Prime Minister and the soldiers of the allied powers.<sup>32</sup>

Despite, these professions of loyalty, the colonial administration mounted an intense propaganda campaign aimed at securing the support of the people of Nigeria. The primary aim of which was to appeal to sentiments.<sup>33</sup> The British officials deployed the traditional rulers who received instructions from the District Officers (D.O.) and the Residents to convey the propaganda:

Propaganda should go out to the people through the Native Authority to the effect that for two years Government had advised the people to “Grow More Food”. They had done so, and now the Government required the maximum possible amount of grain that could be obtained. The price to be made by Government should be announced immediately...The people should be told that though in the past they have

been accustomed to holding food reserves surplus...the position in 1942 is that any such surpluses are now required for the War Effort.<sup>34</sup>

The British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) also broadcast war propaganda at home and in the colonies. The Governor's weekly broadcasts were transmitted and translated into Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, through loudspeakers that were installed in marketplaces or other public places where people congregated.<sup>35</sup>

Side by side with the verbal declaration of loyalty, to the Empire went the recruitment of able-bodied Nigerians into the fighting forces, instituted after the fall of France. The Royal West African Frontier (R.W.A.F.F) was expanded. Each colony was designated as an Area Command and given authority to defend itself and to recruit men into its Territorial Army.<sup>36</sup>

Nigeria also contributed to the war effort through the production of foodstuffs to feed the Armed forces and the civilian populace. This is the main focus of this research. As part of the general colonial policy, the government of Nigeria encouraged the growth of more food and cash crops. By 1944, Nigeria produced millions of tons of groundnuts, grains, cotton, cocoa, rubber, palm produce, cassava, tin etc. For example, productions in the Niger Province between 1/7/43 and 31/12/44 are as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Food Produced in the Niger Province between 1/7/43 and 31/12/44**

	Tonnage	Approximate Value (£)
Guinea Corn (for Govt. & Military)	8065	40325
Rice	2488	22114
Groundnuts	1932	21252
Shea nuts	1215	7290
Twine	220,002 (hanks)	4583
Rope	5,080,408 (yards)	4445
Palm Kernels	608	4134
Cream	21½tons	3864
Bags	33,355(No.)	2223
Rubbers	13	728
Miscellaneous fibre products		618
Fibre	32,689(Ibs)	597
Honey	5	<u>225</u>
	Total Value	<u>£112,398<sup>37</sup></u>

Source: NAI: CSO 26: 38423/ S. 7 ‘History of the War: Northern Provinces’, 6, 13, 17, 27, 42, 46, 55, 60, 64 and 76

### **The Establishment of Import-Substituting Industries**

During the war, it became difficult to ship raw materials to Europe for processing because of the Nazi's submarine warfare and the danger of torpedoes and bombs. Likewise, it was difficult to ship finished products from Europe to the colonies to satisfy consumer demands. The delay in shipping caused by the war led to a fall in the importation of consumer items.<sup>37</sup> Since manufactured goods could no longer be imported, consumers shifted to the

use of local materials to make up for the shortages and scarcity.

The colonial government reformulated its policy to encourage the local production of the goods hitherto imported into the country.<sup>38</sup> The establishment of import-substituting industries attempted to achieve self-sufficiency in essential items, such as cement and other building materials and to maintain the flow of exports by supplying scarce consumer manufactures, such as household goods, cigarettes, and processed foodstuffs,

notably sugar. The establishment of these industries, however, failed to help Indigenous entrepreneurs and may even have hampered the growth of Indigenous businesses. The colonial state may have, with the strategies adopted, helped in the creation of a dependent indigenous entrepreneurial class.<sup>39</sup> They were made dependent, as they were neither encouraged to grow nor were they given sufficient credit facilities. In several respects, they were even seen as incompetent and unreliable. Only those who were willing collaborators were encouraged to grow. Others were stifled. The major economic contribution of the peasants on the other hand was in the form of indirect subsidies to the British government through the fact that they were paid lower prices for their products than they could have commanded at prevailing world market prices.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the foregoing, the establishment of the import-substituting firms eloquently demonstrated that manufacturing plants could operate and thrive in tropical Africa.<sup>41</sup> Examples of such industries were the butter-producing, cheese, and pork-processing factories in Vom, Jos<sup>42</sup> and, the Jam and Marmalade producing factories in Lagos and Abeokuta.<sup>43</sup>

Nigerians were also encouraged to provide military and strategic non-military products, such as tin and rubber which provided not only the war materials but also the much-needed hard currency for metropolitan state coffers.<sup>44</sup> The fall of Allied Far Eastern colonies in 1942-3 significantly enhanced the strategic and economic importance of Nigeria. The Japanese victory in Thailand and Malaya seriously diminished the supply of tin, a vital mineral for the production of tanks and aeroplane engines, radio sets, armoured cars, radio location sets, all types of mechanized transport, and a host of other implements of war. Thus, Nigerian tin ore production became crucial to the British war effort. The colonial government instructed tin producers to increase production by twenty-five per cent. The production of wolfram and columbite, two equally important strategic minerals and by-

products of the tin industry were also stepped up.<sup>45</sup> Japan's occupation of the rubber-producing colonies of Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies (later known as Indonesia), Sarawak and Burma, early in 1942, had dealt "the most devastating blow in the war"<sup>46</sup> on the allied powers as it reduced the world supply of natural rubber. In the Igala Division during the years 1942 – 43, over a sixth of Nigeria's entire export of wild rubber was produced. While in the Kabba Division, over 90% of Nigeria's tantalite was mined, a total which exceeded the world's annual output of this metal before the war.<sup>47</sup>

Nigeria's contribution of men, money, and materials to the British war effort from 1939 to 1945 helped to a large extent to uphold the war to the end. This was made possible through the activities of the traditional rulers, the Western-educated elite, and other groups of British loyalists. To ensure the maximum exploitation of resources for the war effort, a Minister resident in the colonies with cabinet rank was appointed to coordinate economic policy and in particular the activities of the British Ministries of War, transport, and Food Supply within the colonies.

### **The Second World War and Colonial Emergency Powers**

... so that Nigeria may be free from the necessity to import foodstuffs to feed the Services, Departments and population. It is necessary to control the production and the distribution of internal foodstuffs and building up 'buffer' stocks to enforce price control or relieve famine.<sup>48</sup>

The Colonial Government had to exercise some emergency powers to alleviate all the hardships that came with the war. To conserve resources for the imperial war effort, the British government in November 1939, established an official monopoly over the purchase, export, and marketing of all West African agricultural products through the introduction of a quota system, price control

and the regulation of imports under the supervision of certain committees and boards. Shortage of food was one of the most severe problems that the British Colonial administrators faced at this time. It was experienced everywhere in the country. Some areas suffered more than others. Not even the food-producing rural areas could avoid the problem and the related issue of inflation.<sup>49</sup>

The imperial government established war agricultural committees with executive powers in all colonies to direct Britain's three-year food production plan. Their immediate task was to get 1,500,000 extra acres under the plough in 1940.<sup>50</sup> To increase production, companies like the United African Company (U.A.C.), donated 250 hand-press oil machines to the Agricultural Department. John Holt and the U.A.C. increased the importation of Dorchester presses and this aided the increased production of palm products after palm oil supplies were cut off from plantations in Malaya and Sumatra.

The importance of the Nigerian palm culture to the British government became an important project in the wartime development scheme.<sup>51</sup> Palm products were purchased at fixed prices by the government. The big companies like U.A.C. acted only as agents and marketing was supervised by the West African Marketing Board. The West African Produce Control Board, a statutory corporation, operated the export-control system.

Throughout the war, the British government was faced with the problem of food supply, and recruitment into His Majesty's Forces—His Majesty's Forces refers to the Army, the Navy and the Air Force—and conscription for Mines labour, amongst other things. At this time, food shortages occurred resulting in skyrocketing prices.<sup>52</sup> The problems of food supply were in two spheres: food supply to the general public and the supply of foodstuffs to His Majesty's Forces. To tackle this problem; the government instituted the “Grow More Food Campaign” – a drive for increased food production among farmers throughout the country, government also controlled the prices of foodstuffs and

allocated contracts through the establishment of the Tenders Boards to cater for the food requirements of His Majesty's Forces.<sup>53</sup>

To tackle the problem of food supply to His Majesty's Forces and export to other West African Colonies, a Tenders Board was established in 1941.<sup>54</sup> The Nigerian Supply Board called for tenders, which were examined by a Tender Board. The Board considered applications to supply the required commodities to the Food Controller. All supplies approved were subject to examination and the Chief Inspector of Produce in Lagos made necessary arrangements for shipping. This was the case for both local requisitions and export.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Pullen Marketing Scheme**

The food price control scheme began in 1941, under the direction of the Commissioner of the Colony, Captain A.P. Pullen, whose name was promptly attached to the operation. It marked the beginning of an attempt by the government to set prices on selected foodstuffs sold in Lagos and nearby markets. The colonial administration pegged prices in Lagos, the capital, hoping that such an action at the centre would control the problem all over the country. A Food Control Office was created to monitor prices and fix prices for local food items in the local markets.<sup>56</sup>

The inadequacy of food supplies to the merchant marine and the military forced colonial and military authorities to open negotiations with the business class, for the direct supply of foodstuff. This was done through the Regulation 80 of the Nigerian Defence Regulations of 1939, which stated the need for efficient storage, movement, and distribution of foodstuff.<sup>57</sup> However, for the supply of local produce to His Majesty's Forces, the D.A.D.S & T was allowed into the scheme. In this case, the Marketing Officer, who already had a note of quantities and type of products required, approved contractors and their prices, which he got across to either D.A.D.S. & T or His Majesty's ship. The Marketing Officer also arranged through the Produce Inspectors and Agricultural officers that the contractors obtained direct supplies

from the producers, without having to purchase supplies in the open markets in Lagos or other urban centres. This is because sudden demands caused dislocations of normal supplies to the public and sharp fluctuations in prices. Increased army needs for fresh vegetables, meat, fowl, grains etc. were so great that the market was sometimes cleared. The Navy further exacerbated the situation, by coming in on such short notice to obtain all available supplies by paying more than the local market price.<sup>59</sup> After scrutinizing the price quotations tendered, the Marketing Officer allotted contracts and put the contractors in touch with the catering authorities concerned. As a result, prices soared.

The British government took total control of all agricultural activities of the country from the outbreak of the war. The Ministry of Food undertook the purchase of both locally consumed foodstuffs and exports (the entire West African oil seed and cocoa surplus). These purchases were made through European firms (e.g., U.A.C.) already operating in the market. They were obliged to sell all their produce to the British government.<sup>60</sup> At the close of the 1939-40 cocoa season, the West African Cocoa Control Board (W.A.C.C.B) was established to take over the Ministry of Food's duties of purchasing and disposing of Cocoa. However, in 1942 this body was renamed the West African Produce Board, due to the added responsibility of purchasing and selling palm produce and groundnut<sup>61</sup>

The purchase of these commodities was completed in the harvesting months by the government and later placed on the market later in the year at a reasonable price to undercut profiteers. According to the government, the prices were made attractive to stimulate farmers to increase production. The government attempted to stabilize the cost of main foodstuffs for the people so that the cost of living would remain fairly stable.<sup>62</sup> An emergency law to control rubber production was enacted. It empowered the government to exploit private rubber estates. The public was called upon to surrender scraps:

Rubber scrap is wanted by the British Government to make articles needed for war. The United African Company has agreed to act as an honorary collecting agent for rubber scrap which will be sent to England. Any rubber article you do not require, take or send to the nearest UAC Depot. Send in your old tyres, old hot water bottles, hose pipes, rubber soles or anything made of rubber to help win the war.<sup>63</sup>

In all, Nigeria produced 6,803 tons of wild rubber in 1943 and donated a substantial amount of rubber scraps towards the war efforts.<sup>64</sup> Under the compulsory National Service Regulations of 1940, certain categories of workers, such as bricklayers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and those with certain educational qualifications, were required to register for possible enlistment. The rank and file were to be recruited mainly from "approved tribes" and in Nigeria never from a line below that drawn from Okuta through Jebba, Keffi, Jalingo and Yola. With the increasing demand for soldiers, this barrier was abolished, and potential recruits were no longer secured on an ethnic basis.<sup>65</sup> Though the barrier was abolished, the earlier pattern of recruitment still accounted for the predominance of this group of people in what became the Nigerian Army. It must be noted, however, that during World War 1, African troops recruited from Nigeria were mostly Yoruba and Hausa. Recruitments were made mainly from four centres, namely Zungeru, Lokoja, Ibadan and Okigwe.<sup>66</sup> However, recruitment from Okigwe was stopped when recruits from the area proved to be bad military material. The Yoruba people on the other hand later refused to serve in the army because they were no longer willing to leave the placid life of their cocoa farms for the hardship of army life. Apart from this, with education, the people of southern Nigeria were no longer trusted as they were at the forefront of nationalist agitations.<sup>67</sup>

Colonial emergency powers were employed in the interest of the British. Their

interest was the central determining factor in the consideration of any issue involving her interests and her colonies. These emergency powers mostly affected the economy of Nigeria. They laid the foundation of neo-colonialism and its attendant problems. This period marked the beginning of underdevelopment and subsequently drew Nigeria into the global market of unequal exchange. The Nigerian economy was integrated into the structure of the developed capitalist economies, and it was integrated in a manner that has been unfavourable to Nigeria and had ensured that it became dependent on the big capitalist countries. This has manifested itself such that, when they sneeze, Nigeria catches a cold—since structural dependence is one of the characteristics of underdevelopment.

This dependent economic structure was laid with the introduction of import-substitution industries, most of which were closed down at the end of the war. Those that continued after the war persistently got the most out of whatever foreign reserves Nigeria could save up as they were used to purchase the capital goods and the essential raw materials required for the functioning of these industries—industries which were incapable of bringing about sustainable development.

The colonial government concentrated on productive investments in their own country while they invested mainly in the extractive and consumer goods-oriented industries in Nigeria. Instead of re-investing the surplus capital they accumulated from here, they shipped them into their own countries. Instead of having a politically influential and productive capitalist class with a solid and mature bourgeois culture emerging to support and focus its economic and political might towards development. These groups of entrepreneurs were made dependent as they were not encouraged to grow; they were denied credit facilities and seen as never-do-wells. Only those who were willing collaborators were encouraged to grow. Others were stifled. The collaborators connived with the foreign bourgeoisie for the perpetuation of the dependent status of Nigeria's neo-colonial economy.

### Problems of Food Supply

The acute shortage of food supply in the country had been addressed by controlling their prices and calling for tenders from contractors to alleviate the problem, as it affected His Majesty's Forces. This problem had been exacerbated by the export crop promotion of the government, which attracted farmers away from food production. At the same time, farm technology had not improved from the age-long hoe and cutlass culture, and as such, cultivated areas did not increase, as thousands of young men had left the farms to join the military, work in the mines, the industries or get placed on the waiting list. Thus, consumers of food increased while food producers decreased, thereby making for the escalation of the price of foodstuffs.<sup>68</sup>

The attempt at controlling prices was a failure.<sup>69</sup> Instead of solving the problems, the Pullen marketing scheme helped to drive up the prices because the official prices neither reflected production nor handling costs. Critics of this policy argued that the mandated prices were often lower than the combined costs of production and transportation. Thus, market women refused to sell at prices that would deprive them of even a little profit.<sup>70</sup>

The Lagos Markets Control Board was established because the control of prices of local foodstuffs had proved impossible and had increased the standard of living. Thus, the local administration (office of the Commissioner of the colony) had therefore decided to buy local foodstuffs from up country and sell them in the Lagos markets at controlled prices. The execution of this scheme was greatly facilitated by the cooperation of the Association of West African Merchants (A. W. A. M.) in consultation with the Market Women's Committees. The government made bulk purchases of foodstuffs like rice, palm oil, maize, garri, yams and peppers, and sold them at controlled prices to vendors. According to the Government, the controlled prices allowed the sellers a profit of 2d in a 1/- or 16% on the cost price to the government.<sup>71</sup> Grains were rationed with an *Olodo* (an *Olodo* contains about 9lbs) measure per person.

Bulk supplies of palm oil were obtained from the bulk oil plant and sold to vendors in the control centres at 6/- and retailed at 31/2d a bottle giving the vendor 1/- profit on a tin.<sup>72</sup>

The ordinary market continued but it made it impossible for vendors to undercut government prices, as discipline and adherence to controlled prices were maintained among the vendors. In particular, some vendors were turned out of the centre for using wrong-sized bowl measures.<sup>73</sup> However, the Pullen Marketing Scheme was not successful. This marketing scheme included the building of control centres (booths) adjacent to the ordinary markets. The centres were built at Alakoro, Araromi, Idumagbo,<sup>74</sup> Yaba, and Ebute-Meta.<sup>75</sup> To buy food at these centres, buyers were expected to line up in areas cordoned off by barbed wire, and those who cut in line were fined and then imprisoned. Prosecution of defaulters only drove the foodstuffs out of the open market. Though the government could not market all of the produce reaching Lagos consumers, they had hoped that the fixed prices would force down prices in the rest of the economy. However, the farmers were not happy with the low prices paid by the government and so, in turn, hoarded their goods from officials. Instead, they sold their products to local merchants who paid more.

The Pullen stalls became chaotic as people had to line up in the evenings in anticipation of early morning supplies the next day. But even after spending a night in line, prospective buyers could reach the front only to be told that supplies had run out.<sup>76</sup> As such, people resorted to the black markets. It was argued that the black-market customers were bachelors who had to work all day and were unable to shop when Pullen booths were open. By 1944, about two-thirds of Lagos consumers obtained their food supplies from black markets.<sup>77</sup> The government believed the scheme was a success and the public was firmly behind the scheme, as it assisted the masses to obtain what they wanted at reasonable prices, saving them from the bother of subterfuge and the worry of negotiating with retailers.<sup>78</sup> The government

accused unruly African women of sabotaging the scheme, for they made the market chaotic and organized missions to intercept government supply lines. The officials, however, exhorted them to emulate British ladies, who, they claimed stood peacefully in ration lines during the war. But it was clear that market women were at war with the government.

Despite the scheme, the cost of food still soared. By 1942, the prices of banana and tomato had increased by 33%, melon by 75%, yams by 50% and palm oil by 20%. While the price of garri rose from 5s. 6d. in 1939 to 15s in 1945.<sup>80</sup> Between November and December 1944, a hungry mob of over 5,000 took to the streets in the Ikot Ekpene district of Eastern Nigeria in search of garri – a food item which was and remains the commonest staple food among the people of Eastern Nigeria. And its scarcity could be seen as indicating the lowest depth of the deplorable condition of food supply in the region.<sup>81</sup>

At the beginning of the war, the government attempted to tackle the problem of food supply, particularly imported food items, through rationing. All householders resident in Lagos were asked to register their food requirements of imported foodstuffs as ration tickets were to be sold to registered persons alone.<sup>82</sup> At other times, people were asked to register according to the first alphabet of their surnames, for example, all persons whose surnames began with the letter 'K' were asked to register at the Food Control Office.<sup>83</sup> It was when this was no longer deemed fit for purpose that the government employed the use of the boards and the Pullen marketing scheme.

Salt, a commodity which to the Africans is a necessity, was one of the most essential imported food items needed by all at this time. The government reported a serious shortage of salt in the Eastern Provinces in 1941.<sup>84</sup> The shortage and distribution were so bad that it caused disturbances at Ikot-Ekpene and Okpobo Divisions in the Calabar Province. With the expeditious supply of salt by the Food Controller and the tactful handling of the women by the administrative

and Police officers, the situation became normalized.<sup>85</sup> There was a concerted effort towards the local production of salt, especially between 1942 and 1946 when the United Kingdom salts went off the market. The people at the coasts collected and boiled sea water and used the sediments obtained as salt.<sup>86</sup> This method was used with the water collected from local 'salt lakes' at Eyingba in Abakaliki and also in Lake Chad. In other places, people used local inferior salt substances like 'ubulu' salt in Afikpo, 'black salt' from Itu, 'Kaun' (potash) was used as a substitute for salt in the Western provinces.<sup>87</sup> However, local production was almost negligible. This position was summarized thus: "Local production is being stimulated but there is no possibility of more than a fraction of Nigeria's annual requirements of 50,000 tons being met in this way."<sup>88</sup> In the Northern Province, the Native Administration staff spent many hours daily in distributing the limited quantities available to ensure a fair distribution of limited available quantities as best as possible.<sup>89</sup>

Towards the end of 1943, the government came up with another plan. It instituted the Lagos Food Supply Scheme under a Deputy Controller of Native Foodstuffs, Lagos. Prices and supplies to Lagos markets had been unsatisfactory and it was found necessary to further institute Government control,<sup>90</sup> particularly with the acute shortage of grain in 1942. Propaganda went out to the people through the Native Authorities that since the government had for two years advised the people to "Grow More Food", and they had done so, the government required the maximum possible amount of grain and other foodstuffs obtainable.

The prices to be paid by the government were announced immediately and all available supplies were bought. However, it was made clear to the people that they must hold enough reserve to sow in the planting season and enough to provide themselves with the food they require until the next harvest.<sup>91</sup> The Agricultural Officers analysed the production situation and discussed the province district by district with

Administrative Officers. They assessed the state of crops and made detailed assessments of weather conditions alongside harvest prospects. Thus, estimates of increased acreages sown in response to the "Grow More Food" propaganda were made. Based on these various factors, an agreement was reached on the number of foodstuffs, particularly grain that could be expected from the province, on the assumption that weather conditions until the harvest were normal. Hence, the Administrative Officers announced to each District how much grain it had to make available.<sup>92</sup> The firms acted as purchasing and forwarding agents since they already had their scales, stores, clerical staff, and organization (including the delivery of cash to buying points, sacks, bagging twine needles etc.). They had all that was required to handle the expected number of tonnages.<sup>93</sup>

The critical grain situation of 1942 was met by the remarkable efforts of the more northerly areas, named, Sokoto, Katsina and Bauchi. To relieve them of the strain they experienced in 1943, supplies of grain were carried out by Niger, Kabba, Benue, Ilorin, and Oyo. This was because these provinces had more dependable rainfall and greater amounts, more so since their food situation had been more secure.<sup>94</sup> Rice was another foodstuff that was scarce as it was mostly imported. Hence, the government made a policy that was to make rice-growing a permanent feature of the Nigerian economy under the Secretary of State for the Colonies (S of S dispatch), Nigeria No. 339 of 23/11/42 in which it is stated:

"I have followed with much interest the efforts which are now being made to extend the cultivation of rice in Nigeria in connection with the present drive for the increased production of food as part of the War Effort. I am impressed with the results which have so far been achieved and feel that it would be of an advantage if, in the post-war period, rice production could be

maintained as a permanent feature of the economy of West Africa,<sup>95</sup>

The main rice production areas were Niger, Ilorin, Sokoto and Abeokuta Provinces. In a bid to increase rice production, new rice-producing areas were developed. These were Benin, Kabba, Onitsha and Benue. These new areas accounted for the increased production of rice in 1943 and 1944, which succeeded in bringing down the price of rice.<sup>96</sup>

Generally, food shortage was reported in 1941, 1942 and 1945; that of 1942 was acute because of a poor farming season coupled with military demands and a shortage of transportation.<sup>97</sup>

Table 2 below shows the increasing prices of a few of the locally produced foodstuffs between 1939 and 1945:

**Table 2**  
**Price of Staple Foodstuffs, 1939 – 1945.**

Commodity	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Garri	2/3 per cwt	3/6 per cwt	3/10 per cwt	4/3 per cwt	7/5 per cwt	5/6 per cwt	6/6 per cwt
Yam	2/5 per cwt	2/6 per cwt	2/6 per cwt	3/6 per cwt	3/3 per cwt	3/5 per cwt	6/6 per cwt
Palm Oil	3/1 per tin	4/6 per tin	4/- per tin	5/- per tin	8/- per tin	8/- per tin	8/- per tin
Maize	2/6 per cwt	2/4 per cwt	2/7 per cwt	3/3 per cwt	5/9 per cwt	6/- per cwt	6/6 per cwt
Rice	1/1 per cwt	12/6 per cwt	20/- per cwt	28/- per cwt	35/- per cwt	33/ per cwt	30/- per cwt
Groundnut Oil	12/6 per tin	12/- per tin	13/6 per tin	-	-	-	-
Beef	4d per 1b	71/2 per 1b	7d per 1b	7d per 1b	10d per 1b	9d per 1b	1/- per 1b

Source: CSO 26/5/45063/53 in Falola, T. *Politics and Economy in Ibadan 1893 – 1945*. P. 331.

The general economic depression of wartime led to a sharp decline in real income, such that the purchasing power of the people in Nigeria dropped from about 67% to 50% compared to the pre-war level.<sup>98</sup> There was the accompanying progressive rise in the cost of living particularly among the urban workers. Hence, workers and their families faced the danger of underfeeding and needed a commensurate pay rise. The workers had no option but to demand more pay and were

supported by the press and the nationalists. In 1942, a Cost-of-Living Commission was set up in Lagos to examine the adequacy of the workers' pay. Consequently, a cost-of-living allowance, otherwise called COLA was introduced in Lagos and other places to improve the lives of the worker because of the hardship caused by the increased cost of living.<sup>99</sup>

The Commission recommended an increase ranging from 5% to 50% on workers'

salaries as follows:

50% increase in salaries ranging from £1. 4s. 8d. to £4 per month

40% increase in salaries ranging from £4. to £6 per month

21% increase in salaries ranging from £6. to £7 per month

9% increase in salaries ranging from £8. to £10. 15s. 4d per month

5% increase on salaries above £10. 13s. 4d per month.<sup>100</sup>

However, this could not cater to the needs of the workers because of the 30% rise in the cost of living between 1942 and 1945. This rise in the cost of living was inevitable because the pay rise was accompanied by an upward revision in the prices of goods and services. It is worth noting that the prices of millet and guinea corn were used as the basis for calculating COLA.<sup>101</sup>

While COLA remained constant, the price of millet and guinea were going up, particularly with the critical grain situation of 1942. Thus, it did not solve the problems of inflation and would require that once the prices of grain went up there should be a review of COLA. This unbearable situation gave rise to the expansion and radicalization of the trade union movement, which by 1944 had about 30,000 members, particularly when the government was not willing to review salaries in response to the increasing cost of living.<sup>102</sup> They started calling for a revision of the 1942 COLA in 1943 and continued to do so for the next two years as prices kept rising. The situation reached its climax in 1945. The Nigerian workers had no option but to embark on a country-wide strike for 42 days from 21<sup>st</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> August 1945. This, they did, in defiance of the General Defence Regulations proscribing strikes and Lockouts.<sup>103</sup> The government's response to a review in COLA was to acknowledge inflation but blamed it on the market women, saying high prices were due to the unwillingness of the public to cooperate with price controls and that no benefit would come from an upward review of COLA except people were willing to repudiate the black market by purchasing goods at controlled prices.<sup>104</sup> Apart from the support of the media and the nationalists, the

workers also had the full support of the market women. The strike followed the Yoruba common adage that says: "There is nothing that affects the eyes that will not affect the nose."<sup>105</sup> Once the strike commenced, the traders offered credit and lowered prices charged to strikers. They implied they could regulate prices once their interests were involved.<sup>106</sup> The strike forced the Secretary of State for the Colonies to set up the Tudor W. Davies Commission in October to investigate the agitations of the labour Union. The Supreme Council of Nigerian Workers, a new umbrella body, represented the union members before the commission. The Tudor Davies report did not go as far as the labour leaders had hoped but it did recognize in theory that they had a point.

The strike shocked both Africans and Europeans to the realisation that when organized Nigerians had great power that defied white bureaucracy, they could have absolute control of strategic centres throughout the country, and that through threat of force or force, they could compel the government to grant concessions. The strike served as a dramatic opening of a new nationalist era.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

As the world receded from the abyss of war, Nigeria stood poised at the threshold of a new era, primed to chart its course on the ever-evolving stage of global history. The major problem of the war was the shortage of food supply and inflation. The government tried to alleviate the problem through price control, but this was a failure because the fixed prices did not take care of the actual cost of the food item, handling, and transportation costs. So, traders hoarded their wares and sold at prices that did not guarantee even a meagre profit. This led to the flourishing of 'black markets', more so since the Pullen markets were chaotic and there was no guarantee of buying due to the long queues and long hours that people had to stay at the booths. At other times, farmers refused to sell to the government because they were paid too little for their goods. And at times there were low proceeds due to weather conditions and the threat of famine. To this end, workers

demanded a pay rise which soon after could not take care of their needs and so they had to demand an increase in wage earnings. However, the government's position was that too generous a salary increase would only further stimulate war-time inflation. Since the government dilly-dallied, the wait became unbearable for workers, and their desperation found vent in the famous General Strike of 1945, which became a springboard for nationalist agitations in Nigeria.

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