

THE 1913 MEMORIAL: A STUDY OF PROTEST AND DISCORD AMONG THE BRITISH POLITICAL OFFICERS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT This study focuses on the protest, discord and dissatisfaction among the "privileged" British Political Officers, in Northern Nigeria. Hitherto, it has been assumed that protest and discord were phenomena associated with the oppressed and deprived African people. In most of the published works on the British administrative history in Nigeria, enough light has been shed on the wide gap that existed between the British and the African staff in terms of remuneration, housing and medical care (Nicolson, 1969: 90-150). However the problems faced by the British Political Officers especially in Northern Nigeria remain a neglected theme. Like the Nigerian staff, they were not entirely pleased with their conditions of service. In many instances, they were bitter with the cold attitude of the Colonial Office to their problems. They also detested some obnoxious colonial regulations and often found the policy and style of the Northern political leadership unpalatable and cumbersome. In spite of stiff sanctions against erring political officers, entrenched in the British colonial civil service general order, many of them refused to remain silent over issues that ran counter to their interests.

Key Words: Memorial; Protest; Discord; British Political Officers; Colonialism; Administration; Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO THE 1913 MEMORIAL

The developments that led to the 1913 memorial dated back to 1900. Unlike Southern Nigeria, the Northern Protectorate was not financially buoyant. Here the wheels of progress of the colonial administration were kept going through grant-in-aid and subsidy from the British Imperial exchequer and the Southern Nigeria respectively. For instance, for a period of 14 years, from 1900 to 1914, a total sum of £3,878,000 was made available by the British Imperial exchequer (Lugard, 1914: 10). A breakdown shows that the lowest grant-in-aid was made in 1900 which was £75,000, while the highest, £405,000 was made in 1903. (Lugard, 1914: 11-12). This aid was hardly enough to meet the recurrent and capital expenditure of the region. Moreover, a substantial portion of this aid went into maintaining and enhancing the striking capability of the West African Frontier Force. Only a small fraction was allocated to the political department.

The unwillingness of the colonial office to make sufficient money available and its insistence that colonies should be self-supporting made matters worse for the Northern Protectorate government. It became very difficult for the High Commissioner

to push through his annual budget proposal. When approval was given, the budget would be trimmed down which kept the Proposer of the budget wondering and fuming with anger. For instance, in 1899, Frederick Lugard, High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria forwarded to the Colonial Office an annual estimate of £139,000. Out of this, £18,135 or nearly one-seventh of the total budget was allocated to the political department. (CO, 1899: 14). The Colonial Office officials described Lugard's estimate as too ambitious. W. A. Mercer argued that: "It is difficult to see how a commencement on so large a scale can be held to be either necessary or prudent" (CO, 1899: 16). Sir Edward Wingfield condemned the budget and declared that "Colonel Lugard's ideas are much so exalted and contemplate a more complete administration than is possible for some time to come" (CO, 1899: 16-17). Therefore, he suggested a drastic reduction of the budget estimate to £75,754. Antroubus also descended heavily on Lugard's proposal. He contended that the cost of running civil administration in the Northern Protectorate should not exceed £70,000 and that the amount allocated to the Political Department be reduced to £7,785. Taking into consideration the views of the senior officials of the colonial office, Joseph Chamberlain who was the secretary of state for the colonies, directed Lugard to review his estimate downwards. In the revised proposal, Lugard submitted an estimate of £84,000.

Forced to work within a very tight budget, Lugard could not adequately cater for the political officers. In most administrative divisional headquarters, the residential quarters for the District officers and their assistants were made of mud with thatched roofs and circular in shape. The official quarters of the Residents were also made of similar materials except that they were larger in circumference (Greaves, 1905: 20). A few exceptions were those constructed at Lokoja and Zungeru which were made of wood with zinc roofs and raised some meters above ground level (Izard, 1912: 10).

The provision of housing facilities for the political officers in Northern Nigeria stood in sharp contrast to what were obtained in most parts of the Southern Nigeria and other British West African colonies. In these areas buildings made largely of baked bricks were set up for the political officers. The British Residency was easily distinguished by its wide green lawns and impressive Victorian architectural designs. The Northern political officers often made reference to these disparities and cried out for better housing at least on health grounds.

The other conditions of service which constituted a major source of discontentment were the issues of remuneration and promotion. For instance, an administrative officer joined the service on an annual salary of £300 and earned a graduated annual increment of £15 until a bar of £400 was reached. The officer stayed on this level until a vacancy existed in the next salary grade level which was £400-£20-£500. The last grade was £500-£25-£600 (Cameron, 1939: 267). The common complaints of the administrative officers were firstly, that promotion to the next grade was slow. Secondly, if there was no vacancy, there was *ipso facto* no promotion. In fact, many officers never earned promotion before they retired from service.

Lastly, where vacancy existed in the next grade, there was no clear guideline for promotion to this grade. Merit seemed not to be the determining factor. What was obvious and generally believed among the administrative officers, was that promotion was at the mercy of the High Commissioner. It was not uncommon to find a rel-

actively young officer promoted over the head of his senior. For example, Mr. Call was promoted over Major Larymore as first class district officer. Similarly E. J. Arnett, a second class resident was by-passed during the promotion exercise of 1912, and his junior, H. R. Palmer, was promoted to the rank of the First Class Resident (CSO, 1902; 25). Thus poor promotion prospects and lack of guidelines governing promotion generated a great deal of ill feelings among the political officers.

Added to the above was the irregular manner in which duty pay was made. Duty pay was a form of an annual allowance ranging from £80 to £120 paid to a substantive resident in charge of a province. Where confusion usually arose was in the provinces that had no substantive residents and senior administrative officers performed their functions in acting capacity. These acting officers were not entitled to duty pay. This was considered unfair.

The administrative officers also had a score to settle with the Colonial Office on the issue of annual leave allowance. The Colonial Office approved half pay for three months for junior officers and up to six months for the senior staff. The political officers, however, wanted the Colonial Office to regard the annual leave as an extension of their administrative service which should attract full pay.

In addition, there was the issue of the rising cost of living in Northern Nigeria. The situation was made precarious by the dominant position of the Niger Company. Though its charter was revoked in 1899, its hold on the commercial life of Northern Nigeria never eroded (FO, 1899: 14). The provision stores were monopolized by the company, and charged very high prices. Writing in February 1905, Herbert Goldsmith (CSO, 1905: 30) the Resident of Nupe Province remarked that:

The cost of living in Northern Nigeria is higher today than it was 4 years ago. The Niger Company still has a practical monopoly and charges exorbitant prices for English stores.

Similarly, Major H. D. Larymore, the Resident of Kabba Province and Wilson Jones, the Cantonment Magistrate of Lokoja, complained bitterly about the cost of living. In his memorandum dated November 28 (CSO, 1904: 11), Larymore observed that "expenses in Kabba Province have appreciably increased during the last two years." The rising cost of living led many political officers to further demand better conditions of service.

Lugard's attitude and style of administration contributed in no small measure in alienating some staff. Appointed as the first High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria in 1900, Lugard had no civil service experience. He was a military man through and through (Lugard, 1880: 1-401). Given this background, Lugard naturally saw his appointment as High Commissioner as a military assignment that should be executed with military precision. Orders flowed from him downwards. He brooked no criticism, and he easily lost his temper when such criticism was made against his administration. With this attitude, Lugard could not create a forum where his staff could rub minds with him. The absence of this created a serious communication gap. This provided a fertile ground for the spread of rumour, suspicion and fear.

As a result of his military background, Lugard preferred military officers to seasoned administrators to serve in the Political Department. To him (CO, 1903: 30),

Army Officers are an admirable class of men.... They are gentlemen, their training teaches them prompt decision, their education in military law gives them a knowledge of the rules of evidence and judicial procedure.

His preference created an unhealthy situation.

In the art of administering the colonized people, the performance of these army officers revealed that they were not "admirable class of men" as Lugard believed. When Oxford and Cambridge Universities began to turn out qualified graduates in colonial administration, a dichotomy was created between Lugard's soldier-administrators, and the university-trained, well-bred Englishmen (CO, 1903: 25). The latter group, who increasingly constituted the majority of the colonial staff towards the end of 1914, called for a halt to the recruitment of army officers arguing that the administrative service in Northern Nigeria required seasoned and well rounded administrators. Lugard, however, did not relent.

In his first period in office (1900-1906), Lugard was less fortunate to work under secretaries of state who were less sympathetic towards his developmental programmes. These secretaries were Joseph Chamberlain and the Earl of Elgin. They were not prepared to commit huge amounts of British tax-payer money to the development of the Northern Protectorate. In order to generate money internally, Lugard introduced a series of levies on canoes, native breweries, and caravans (CO, 1906: 15). His fiscal measures placed much burden on the administrative officers. To ensure optimum performance, political officers who collected the highest levy without civil unrest earned accelerated promotion.

Many residents complained that the levies were unpopular and hence difficult to collect. For example, the canoe owners found it more convenient to destroy their canoes than pay the taxes (Apata, 1990: 145-160). A.M. Lafone, the Nupe Resident in 1906 noted that, "the canoe tax is oppressive and harmful to commerce causing a great diminution in the canoe traffic." He further confirmed, "I found that canoes formerly used for trading were concealed in the bush and were rotting there, the older ones being broken up and their planks used for other purposes and no new canoes were built" (CSO, 1906: 25). On the same issue, J.A. Ley Greaves, Resident of Kabba Province stated inter alia, "I must say that in the short time I have been in Northern Nigeria, what I have seen of the canoe tax appears to do a lot of harm." The story was the same from the reports submitted by Residents J.E.C. Blakency of Nassarawa Province, F.H. Buxton of Muri, G.N. Bardey of Yola, A.D. Larymore of Borgu, and E.J. Arnett of Zaria. By these remarks, the Residents earned Lugard's displeasure and delayed promotion. Larymore and Arnett sent protest letters to Lugard on the issue of promotion. His reply was that they did not deserve it (CSO, 1906: 30).

Another administrative action by Lugard which provoked dissatisfaction among the political officers was the frequent administrative changes, coupled with the frequent transfer of administrative officers. In January, 1900, Lugard divided the entire Northern Protectorate into five provinces. By August the same year, the number rose to seven. In 1903, the provinces were further divided into sixteen (Apata, 1986: 80-116). Similarly, the administrative districts and divisions were constantly and frequently adjusted. These adversely affected staff postings. Added to this, there was no

assurance that the administrative structure would ever assume fixed or permanent forms. Indeed Lugard (CO. 1904: 35) made it very clear in the Residents' proclamation of 1900 that:

Every Resident or Assistant Resident shall be removable from one province to another, and the area included within his jurisdiction shall be liable to increase, diminution or alteration from time to time at the discretion of the high commissioner.

Under the above situation, it was not unusual for a Resident to serve in more than three provinces within a month. The matter was even worse for the junior officers. The frequent transfers told heavily on their health. Besides, the method did not encourage continuity in administration. In Southern Nigeria, the administrative officers were allowed to remain at their posts for a reasonably long time. For example, traveling commissioners Bower, Ambrose and Reeve-Tucker, were assigned at different periods to the North-East districts of Lagos Colony where each served more than two years. Hence their knowledge about the people under their jurisdiction was enhanced. In contrast, the political officers in Northern Nigeria became virtually rolling stones and their morale was dampened in the process.

The Indirect Rule System was another sore point. This administrative practice has received much attention in many works (Hannah, 1969: 201-211). However one point that is often ignored is the impact of the system on the political officers. Certainly, it has not gone down well with many of them. A system which was originally adopted by Lugard to off-set the high cost of administering the vast Northern Nigeria, later became a veritable colonial administrative policy which assumed different forms. Walter Crocker (Crocker, 1971: 215), an Assistant District Officer put it thus:

Indirect Rule degenerated firstly into a systematic glorification of a number of able but unscrupulous careerists, secondly into the practice of preserving at all costs the status and power of the families of the hereditary emirs and chiefs, and thirdly into an undue preoccupation with islam and the emirates to the neglect of pagan peoples.

The operation of this system made it difficult to discipline corrupt and erring emirs. An administrative officer who openly made cutting remarks about an emir was immediately described as not sufficiently "imbued with the spirit of indirect rule" (Crocker, 1971: 216). This act could cost the officer his promotion, or he was simply transferred to the non-emirate areas. Political officers, such as Bryan Sharwood Smith and Walter Crocker, among others suffered this fate. In other words, to be in good standing with the High Commissioner, a political officer must be transparently an indirect ruler.

The Indirect Rule System, therefore, virtually divided the political officers into two opposite camps. The first consisted of those who displayed commitment to the system, and these usually served in the classical emirates. Those in this camp often earned enhanced promotion. Notable among them were H.R. Palmer, Boyle, Orr and Temple. The second group was comprised of the "non-indirect rulers." These served in the non-emirate areas located largely in the Niger-Benue confluence.

Under Lugard's administration it was inconceivable for a political officer in this camp to rise to the rank of a First Class Resident. Officers in this camp, therefore, became the most dissatisfied and aggrieved group within the administrative cadre in Northern Nigeria.

Under the British Colonial rule, Hausa language was accorded great importance. Section 70 of the civil service General Order made it compulsory for every administrative officer in Northern Nigeria to pass a Hausa language test (CSO, 1906: 10). In fact no officer earned promotion and gratuity without passing the Hausa test. This was divided into two sections. The first was lower Hausa standard which was made up of simple translation from English to Hausa and vice-versa. An administrative officer was expected to sit and pass this test at the end of his first field tour.

The second part was the Higher Hausa standard which was mainly an oral examination. The candidate's fluency in Hausa was assessed. This test was taken at the end of the second tour. Between 1900-1908, Dr. Miller was the sole Hausa examiner. After this date, the circular of the examinar was expanded to include Temple, Palmer, and Vischer.

The emphasis on Hausa language had many pitfalls. In the first place, Hausa was just one of the several languages spoken in Northern Nigeria. Among the O-kun Yoruba, Lgala, Tiv, Jukun, Afemai, Okpoto, and Ldoma people, Hausa language was alien. Hence, administrative officers serving among these peoples found it extremely difficult to learn Hausa. For example, J.C. Sciortino who was in charge of Kabba Province failed the Hausa examination in two attempts. J. C. Walker an Assistant Resident of Kukuruku (Afemai) district failed after several attempts and there was no hope that he would ever make it. Several petitions were sent to the Secretary of State by the administrative officers serving in the non-Hausa speaking areas of Northern Nigeria. One such petition written by Walker (CSO, 1908: 15) made it clear that:

Kabba province is a non-Hausa speaking province, the alien languages commonly heard being Yoruba and Nupe... and officer posted to one of the Hausa speaking provinces hears Hausa spoken from the day he commences his tour up to the day his tour ends. An officer in a pagan province may hear it spoken occasionally as an alien language.... I submit that to rule that both officers must pass the same examination at the end of their first tour is an unfair ruling.

Since success in Hausa language examination led to enhanced promotion, it became a very sensitive issue. The failure of the Northern Colonial leadership to listen to genuine complaints from officers and to make amendments in respect of the regulation governing Hausa examination, became one of the root causes of dismay among the officers.

I have so far presented the survey of the major areas and causes of discontentment among the Northern administrative officers. Lugard did little or nothing to reassure these officers. Hence when he resigned in 1906, the majority of them heaved a sigh of relief. His successors, Percy Girouard (1908-1909) and Hesketh Bell (1910-1911) were less autocratic and took care not to step on the toes of the administrative officers. The reappointment of Lugard in 1912 as Governor-General struck fear in the

minds of the political officers. His second appearance was interpreted as a bad omen. The time was ripe to present their memorial.

THE 1913 MEMORIAL

It is significant that the memorial was presented at the time when Frederick Lugard had just returned to office. Two immediate factors were responsible for this move. The first which had been briefly discussed was the reappointment of Lugard. He was no a stranger to the administrative officers. The majority of them were convinced that Lugard would simply take off where he stopped in 1906. Second, Lugard was back in Nigeria in 1913 with a mission to amalgamate the Northern and the Southern Protectorates. The Northern administrative officers expressed genuine fear that the amalgamation package held out no bright future prospects for them as it included no clause on their welfare. This last issue was the spark which set the situation ablaze.

Before Hesketh Bell left office in 1911, a new salary structure was approved for the administrative officers in Northern Nigeria which was as follows: (CSO, 1911: 20).

First Class Resident	£750-£225-£850 (duty pay £150)
Second Class Resident	£500-£225-£700 (duty pay £100)
Third Class Resident	£400-£20-£500 (duty pay £80)
Assistant Resident	£300-£15-£400 (no duty pay)

A ceiling was placed on the number of officers for each class. In the first class bracket the number was pegged at 5, second class 16, third class 26, and Assistant Residents 85. Although the Colonial Office approved this new salary structure, one thing was obvious—it favoured the senior officers.

Before sailing to Nigeria, Lugard made some amendments which he forwarded to the Colonial Office for approval. He recommended that the number of Third Class Resident be increased to 39 and all officers in the Political Department to enjoy duty pay allowance. He also recommended the reduction of the number of Assistant Residents to 72. In addition, he forwarded few names for accelerated promotion. These were Messrs Gill and Tomson. Gill had joined the service in November 1904. He was recommended for promotion from Third to Second Class resident with a salary of £550 per annum. Tomson, on the other hand, had joined the administrative service on 6 July 1907 and was promoted to Second Class Resident (CSO, 1912: 25). It is pertinent to note that these officers were the ring leaders of the 1913 protest movement. Where Lugard erred was that his recommendations and the approval given by the Colonial Office to the new salary structure were kept top secret. Hence, the beneficiaries knew nothing about what was in stock for them. Therefore the suspicion, fear, and anxiety of the administrative officers remained unabated. Many of them did not hope that the second coming of Lugard would herald a new era which would usher in better conditions of service.

In 1913, the morale of the administrative staff was at its lowest ebb. Given this debilitating but charged atmosphere, it required little to trigger off the situation. This

was provided by Resident Gill of Kano, Thompson of Borno, and W. P. Hewby-a Senior Resident. The 1913 protest was meticulously planned and swift. It was essentially non-violent in nature. Gill, Thompson and Hewby drew up a long and comprehensive list of administrative officers' grievances. This was circulated round the Northern provinces and every administrative officer was expected to append his signature. Within a month, by September 1913, all the administrative officers in ten out of thirteen provinces had signed the memorial. Like bush fire, the protest movement spread. The provinces which supported the movement included Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, Borno, Yola, Nassarawa, Kontagora, Ilorin, Benue, and Bauchi. It is obvious that the administrative officers in the remaining three provinces of Kabba, Bassa, and Muri would have signed if the "Charter of Grievances" had reached them before the official intervention.

All the signatories agreed that the memorial should be sent directly to Lewis van Harcourt, the Secretary of State, with a covering letter written by Hewby. The objective was to make the Colonial Office, the highest organ of authority on colonial matters, aware of the plight of the administrative officers in Northern Nigeria. Hewby's covering letter left no one in doubt about the determination of the signatories to draw the attention of the home government to their plight. In his opening paragraph, Hewby made it clear that the "contents of the Memorial were legitimate and sound" (CSO, 1913: 151). He summed up the real issues involved as thus:

The fact remains which those at the head of the service can hardly ignore that there exists a certain spirit of unhealthy discontent among the staff.

He further expatiated this issue thus:

The main idea is that there is a widespread feeling that the present conditions of service do not attract the best recruits and that the tendency in recent years does not inspire the political staff with hope for future.

OFFICIAL REACTIONS

The rapidity with which the protest movement spread was as baffling to official circles as it was intriguing. Lugard expressed utter shock and dismay. In his own words: "I was disappointed to receive this Round Robin to the Secretary of State." He strongly felt that the memorial ought to have been sent to him in the first instance. The failure of the signatories to hold a dialogue with Lugard before taken action infuriated him. He remarked, "I regret that they (political officers) did not find some way of consulting me directly or indirectly before taking this step" (CSO, 1913: 20). He also found it hard to understand the involvement of Gill and Thompson in the protest movement. It will be recalled that these officers were recommended for promotion by Lugard. In the same vein, he criticized the role played by Hewby, and dismissed the allegations made by the signatories, especially those that touched on the conditions of service as far from the truth. According to Lugard, the conditions of service enjoyed by the political officers in Northern Nigeria were

quite attractive and compared favourably with those in other parts of British Empire.

To force the signatories to withdraw the memorial, Lugard recommended a stay of action on the recent promotions made by him. He also ordered the immediate retirement of Hewby. Furthermore, he directed the Acting Chief Secretary, H. S. Goldsmith to despatch a telegraphic message to the "rebellious" provinces urging the promoters of the memorial to withdraw the action.

The responses of the political officers to Goldsmith's telegraph varied. In a few cases, it succeeded in getting few provinces to stay action. These were Ilorin and Kotangora. In some areas, it led to a serious division among the officers. For example at Minna, out of five administrative officers, only Langworthy withdrew his signature. At Jemaa, Sciortino caused the memorial to be withdrawn without the consent of other signatories in the area. This led to rancour among them. At Kano, Vischer indicated his intention to withdraw if others would not suffer by his action.

On the whole, the majority of the political officers stood their ground and urged that the memorial should not be withdrawn. Gill, for instance, replied thus (CSO, 1913: 30):

Withdrawal on the part of one province would obviously involve disloyalty to our colleagues in other provinces especially Hewby.

The reply of Thompson was stunning and unequivocal. He wrote, "I have no power to withdraw signatories of memorial.... Harm to serve will not be done by revealing but by omitting" (CSO, 1913: 35). Arnett of Sokoto simply summed up the desire of Sokoto signatories thus, "Sokoto wish memorial forwarded" (CSO, 1913: 37). Thus H. S. Goldsmith failed to secure the approval of the majority of the aggrieved officers to withdraw the memorial. In his words, "It is a great disappointment to me that I have been unable to obtain a unanimous withdrawal of this memorial" (CSO, 1913: 40).

Although the pressure from Lugard and his Acting Secretary failed to dissuade the political officers, the latter's insistence that the memorial be sent to the Secretary of State did not bring immediate relief. If Lewis Harcourt were not the Secretary of State at the time of the memorial, the aggrieved officers would probably have received a sympathetic hearing. Harcourt had, in many occasions, lauded Lugard and his style of administration. He saw him as an acknowledged authority on African affairs. In one of his letters to Lady Flora Lugard in 1913, Harcourt (Perham, 1960: 619) wrote:

Your husband has an unrivalled experience in Africa. He is the greatest living authority on African affairs. And I do assure you when the other members of the colonial staff come to me at the office and want to disagree with something he has laid down I shrug my shoulders and say "I don't know", but I trust Lugard to know better than any of us and he must have his way....

Thus when Lewis Harcourt received the memorial, he simply referred it back to Lugard adding that he would take no action on it. On his part, Lugard did all he could to keep the political officers silent.

Lewis Harcourt's inaction did not mean that the political officers had failed in their protest bid. One of the objectives of the memorial was to draw the attention of the highest colonial authority to the plight of the political officers. This was realised. The memorial took Lugard and the entire Northern Secretariat by storm. The Colonial Office was also aware that all was not well in the Northern administrative service. That the battle was not lost, was further demonstrated after the retirement of Lugard from the Nigerian service in 1919. His successor, Sir Hugh Clifford, set about to improve the lot of the political officers. He set up a panel to review the conditions of service of the political officers. One of the members of the panel was Donald Cameron (Gailey, 1974: 267). Clifford also ordered the immediate retirement of H. S. Goldsmith (Okonjo, 1974: 215-217), because he was too attached to the Lugardian system and would have nothing fresh to offer the new administration.

CONCLUSION

This article has traced the remote and immediate causes of the 1913 memorial. Some of the remote factors were the reluctance of the Colonial Office to make sufficient money available to the Northern Nigerian government, poor conditions of service, Lugard's attitude and style of administration, and obnoxious Colonial regulations. The immediate causes included the return of Lugard to office in 1913 and the bleak amalgamation programme.

It has also been shown that Frederick Lugard and his Acting Chief Secretary, H.S. Goldsmith attempted to forestall the protest movement but failed. All in all, the refusal of the Colonial Office to listen to the aggrieved political officers was due to the fact that the King that knew Joseph occupied the chair of the Colonial Office.

NOTES

- (1) This is a revised paper presented at the History Departmental Seminar on 3rd May 1985. I wish to acknowledge the contributions and comments of the academic staff of the Department.
- (2) The concept "political officers" is used in this article to refer to the top British Administrative Officers in the Political Department. In this article therefore, the term "political officers" is synonymous with Administrative officers. The two terms are used inter-changeable.

ABBREVIATIONS

CO: Colonial Office Record, London
 CSO: Chief Secretary's Office, Lagos
 FO: Foreign Office, London
 Loko Prof: Lokoja Province, Northern Nigeria.

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