

# **The Rigging of Nigerian History**

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I have read, with keen interest, the two cover stories of TELL magazine published earlier this month. These focused on Nigerian political history in the 1950s and the 1960s, as seen from the view point of Mr. Harold Smith, a former British colonial Labour Officer posted to Lagos in 1955-1960.

## **The Packaging of Harold Smith**

The first story has a screaming and sensational headline: *“How Britain Rigged Elections, Census for the North - Former Colonial Officer.”* This was published on the March 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 edition of the magazine. It covered a total of 13 pages with a one-page introduction by the editor of TELL, Ayodele Akinkuotu, captioned: *“The Evils The British Did”*.

In this introduction, an attempt has been made by Mr. Akinkuotu to paint a saintly picture of Harold Smith, in order to give credence to what he wrote and said. The rest of the 12 pages of the cover story were made up of carefully selected excerpts of the unpublished autobiography of Mr. Harold Smith, titled, *Blue Collar Lawman*.

These excerpts are clearly aimed at denigrating the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, NCNC, its President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and its Federal Minister for Labour and Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. The excerpts also painted a similar picture of the Northern Region and its ruling party, the Northern Peoples Congress, NPC. But in a sharp contrast to the above two cases, the excerpts paid glowing tribute to the Action Group, AG, and its leaders Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Anthony Enahoro, presenting them as virtual saints; and claiming that they were victims of political machinations of the British, the NCNC and the NPC.

After a fortnight, on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2005, TELL came out with another sensational headline on Harold Smith. This time, Harold Smith was brought live with an interview through the Internet. This interview was published as the cover story with a title: *“Exclusive Interview: The British Expected Nigeria to Break Up - Harold Smith, Former Colonial Officer”*. This covered 10 pages of the magazine.

It was also divided into two parts. The first part was made up of 3 pages of introduction to the interview. This was titled: *“A Bureaucrat as an Idealist,”* written by Dele Omotunde, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of TELL magazine. In this write up, Harold Smith was again eulogised:

*“As a patriot, Smith is also fighting for the reinstatement of British honour which he says had been cruelly defiled by the sordid, evil machinations of men at the helm*

*of affairs in the old colony who handed over a counterfeit democracy on the eve of independence in 1960.” (P.26)*

The second part of the cover story is made up of an interview with Harold Smith, covering pages 29-35 of the magazine. The questions raised followed the pattern of the selected excerpts from the unpublished autobiography of Harold Smith.

### **The Credibility of Harold Smith**

The two editions of the TELL magazine on Harold Smith’s version of recent Nigerian political history, made me to go to his website and read the story, in its complete form, as he wrote it. I had to do this, because decolonisation is the subject of research I have been actively involved in for nearly twenty years. Indeed, I had spent one year in the UK, 1989-1990, recovering written and oral primary source material on this subject.

In the course of this research, besides the field, library and archival work I have done in Nigeria, I had interviewed, in the UK, a number of former colonial officials and had combed libraries there and worked in the Public Records Office, London. The evidence in the primary sources which I have recovered, assessed and studied, up to now, contradict this picture of this period of Nigerian political history painted by Harold Smith and eulogised by TELL magazine. After reading the story of Mr. Harold Smith from his website I identified three important elements which call into question his whole credibility as a source for Nigerian political history in this period.

Firstly, Mr. Harold Smith’s claim that he refused to obey the orders of the Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir James Robertson, to take part in the rigging of the 1956 election into the Western Regional House of Assembly, in Warri, the political base of Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, in favour of the NCNC, is not substantiated by any evidence and by the subsequent course of his career in the colonial service in Nigeria. But, although he claims that he refused to obey what he calls, an “illegal order,” to rig elections, he was not queried nor officially sanctioned by anyone.

According to his own account, in his autobiography, it was only, four years later, in 1960 that he claimed that, the Governor – General, Sir James Robertson, invited him to the Government House, Marina, Lagos, to warn him to shut up over this “illegal order” and threaten him. What explained the gap of four years between his refusal to obey the instructions of the Governor-General of Nigeria in 1956 and the warning and threat from the Governor – General in 1960?

Was it because it was only in 1960 that he decides to expose the Governor General’s “illegal order” of 1956, and the Governor –General learnt of this and moved in to warn and threaten him? If that is the case, where is the documentary evidence that he was going to use to expose the Governor – General? Or, was he only going to rely on hearsay, by word – of – mouth, to expose such a high – ranking official of the British colonial establishment, as Sir James Robertson? If he has any documentary evidence for this whole episode over the elections, and anything else on Nigerian politics and elections, why has

he not put them in his autobiography, giving their sources and posted them on his website?

How come, that, after his refusal to obey the orders of the Governor – General in 1956, he finished his first two-year contract in 1957, and went to the UK on six months leave and the Colonial Office renewed his contract with the Ministry of Labour in Lagos, for another two years, without any problem? This second contract also run its natural course and ended in 1960, when he departed for UK, like any other colonial official.

Even if it is true that he was summoned by the Governor – General in 1960 and warned and threatened over these 1956 elections in Warri, this did not seem to have made any differences to his employment in the British colonial government in Nigeria. How credible, therefore, are all his stories and claims?

Secondly, Mr. Smith was not a political officer, he was just a Labour Officer at the Ministry of Labour headquarters, in Lagos and, was, therefore, not in a position to know, the real wheeling and dealing among Nigerian politicians and between them and the British colonial government, in the critical period of transition to independence, 1950-1960.

Mr. Harold Smith was on the margins of the Nigerian political environment. The Colonial Office recruited him into the Labour Department in 1954, and he arrived Lagos in 1955. Even in Lagos, he was pre-occupied with the problems of his Labour Department, where he was busy working on the Factories Act and the Provident Fund. These were clearly where his duties were located in the colonial service.

Therefore, the claim by Ayodele Akinkuotu that Harold Smith was “neck-deep in laying the foundation for the British retreat from Nigeria” is false, and is without any foundation. He was not, in any way even near those, “neck-deep” involved in laying the foundation for the British retreat from Nigeria.

Indeed, the claim of Mr. Smith that, “when I suggest that the British Government meddled with the democratic elections in Nigeria, I write as an authority” is patently false. He was only a minor official in a specialised department of the British colonial government in Nigeria, where he served for about five years, 1955-1960, entirely in Lagos. Even in Lagos, he did not mix with Nigerians and therefore remained on the sidelines.

In addition, he had no experience in colonial service and colonial political intrigues because his Nigerian service was the only record of experience he had in the massive, worldwide, British colonial machinery and it was the only formal employment he himself maintained in his entire 78-year life.

Thirdly, he was not close to a single Nigerian politician, or to a British colonial political officer as is clearly evident from his autobiography. In fact, the closest he got to a Nigerian politician, was that he was a staff of the Ministry of Labour when Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh of the NCNC became its Minister, shortly after his arrival in Nigeria.

### **His Hatred for Okotie – Eboh and Nwokedi**

Part of the problem of Harold Smith as a source, is that he hated Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh with an irrational intensity, for reasons, which are not clear, except the accusation of corruption against the Chief. Even in this case, he did not substantiate it beyond the claim that the Chief sold one of the buildings of the Ministry of Labour in Apapa. He did not give any details to substantiate this accusation. He just accused Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh of being a stooge of the British colonial government without evidence.

In fact, I am tempted to argue that Harold Smith did not like Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh because as the Minister he represented the fact of Nigerian independence. For Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh becoming a Minister meant that Harold Smith, who had failed to secure a good employment, in UK before, and after, going to the University of Oxford, and had to seek for employment as a Labour Officer in colonial Nigeria, would have to retrace his steps back.

This becomes logical when we put into account that Harold Smith also hated Mr. Francis Nwokedi, the most senior Nigerian civil servant in the Labour Department. He was a supporter of the NCNC and rose to become Harold Smith's Permanent Secretary. In fact, he did not mention in his autobiography, the name of a single Nigerian in the Labour Department, or any other Department that he was close to, or interacted with.

He merely called these Nigerians clerks, typists and African staff, without mentioning their names. Maybe, he did not think that it is important to know their names and mention these in his autobiography, in the way that he did to each and every European staff that he worked with, or even came across. The truth is that the closest Nigerians to Harold Smith were his household servants, whose names he knew and mentioned them in his autobiography.

Harold Smith's hatred for Nigerian independence, and for those who personalised this independence to him, like Okotie – Eboh and Nwokedi, because he had to work under them, is clearly stated in the first paragraph of chapter one of his autobiography, where he states, categorically, that:

*“The British retreated from West Africa almost in a state of panic. A few African nationalists were making noisy demands for freedom from the Colonial yoke, but the riots and rebellions hardly existed and no blood was shed in Nigeria expelling the forces of Imperialism [!]. The British withdrawal took place in haste, because world opinion was beginning to demand that the Colonial powers spend money on their African possessions. If this suggests that Britain exploited its Colonies it simply is not true [!]....*

*The vast mass of the African people was indifferent or actually would have preferred the British to stay” [!]. (p.1)*

Harold Smith makes a blanket condemnation of the performance of the leaders of the former British West African territories, which became independent in the 1960s. He clearly denounced African independence. He was even calling for the return of British colonial rule when he said:

*“Whatever the shortcomings of British Colonial Administration in Africa, some of the more or less well ordered systems which were*

*handed over to the native populations in the 1960's degenerated fairly quickly into corrupt, one-party states. Many of the native peoples must have looked back with regret to Independence and wished once more for British rule.” (p. 4, my emphasis)*

### **The Claims of Harold Smith**

This brings me to the substance of Mr. Harold Smith’s autobiography, which obviously, the TELL magazine wanted to disseminate. They revolve basically around four issues.

Firstly, Mr. Harold Smith claims that the British colonial government rigged the 1956 regional elections in the Western Region in favour of the NCNC. Secondly, he claims that the NPC and the NCNC were favoured to form the independence government by the British against the Action Group. Thirdly, he claims that the British government rigged census figures to favour the Northern Region. Fourthly, he claims that the violent overthrow of the First Republic was brought about because of the persecution of Chief Awolowo due to the effective role he played as the Leader of Opposition. I will take these one –by - one, to show that Harold Smith has no credibility as a source for this period of Nigerian political history. Mr. Harold Smith, far from exposing British rigging of Nigerian elections is just trying to rig Nigerian history for his own purposes.

### **The 1956 Western Regional Elections**

According to Harold Smith, he was instructed by Sir James Robertson, the Governor General of Nigeria, to make available vehicles and staff of the Ministry of Labour to NCNC candidates contesting election into the Western Region House of Assembly at Warri, the hometown of the Minister of Labour, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. He said he refused to carry out the order. This is how he reported it in his autobiography.

*“I was one of the British officers serving on the headquarters staff in Lagos, chosen by the Governor General, Sir James Robertson, to mastermind the covert action to rig Nigeria's elections. This secret operation hatched in Whitehall was of course a gross betrayal of trust by Prime Ministers Sir Anthony Eden and Mr Harold Macmillan. The orders which arrived on my desk from the Governor General before the elections for the Western Regional Government in 1956 were quite illegal and in direct contravention of Nigerian and British law.” (p. 5)*

Mr. Smith, however, did not give any details of the alleged rigging of the election in favour of the NCNC, either in Warri or any other constituency in the Western Region. Mr. Harold Smith did not follow the events by collecting all the relevant materials to prove the rigging of the 1956 elections. For he should know that it is not enough to throw accusations of election rigging against the British,

and the NCNC, without bringing out the facts and the figures of how this rigging took place.

How did the staff and vehicles of the Lagos Office of the Ministry of Labour help to rig the election in Warri and elsewhere in the Western Region? Unless Harold Smith can bring out the evidence of this, he would appear just to be engaged in trying to rig the history of these elections for his own purposes.

#### **The NCNC, the AG and the British**

I have raised these issues and questions because the NCNC was the leading political party produced by Nigerian nationalists in the course of the struggle for independence. This is in the sense that the process of its formation in 1944, its objectives and activities involved, for the first time, the massive mobilisation of the colonised people of Nigeria from cities, towns and villages, to struggle for their emancipation from colonial yoke imposed on them by the likes of Harold Smith. The successes recorded by the NCNC in the mobilisation of the ordinary people of Nigeria to struggle for independence, earned the party and its leadership, particularly Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, the dislike and hostility of the colonial administration and some of its leading officials.

I would like to cite few examples of the formidable achievements of the NCNC, which earned the party the dislike and hostility of the British Colonial Government in Nigeria and the Colonial Office. One of the first important acts of the NCNC after its formation in August 1944 was to join hands with the trade unions under the leadership of Michael Imoudu to organize the first Nigeria-wide strike by workers in 1945. It was so successful and effective that even night soil men joined it and British officials were forced to do menial jobs. This strike lasted for 44 days and its impact was politically and economically devastating to the British.

Soon after this strike ended, the NCNC increased the pressure by organising a national mobilisation campaign in 1946 to get the oppressed people of Nigeria to reject the attempt to divide them along ethnic and regional lines through the Richards' Constitution. This constitution created three regions and made them new centres of political power. The objective of this regionalisation of Nigerian politics was to block the political ascendancy of the NCNC, which was mobilising Nigerians across the ethnic, religious and regional divides. The 1946 campaign was so successful that the NCNC became a household name in Nigeria.

The NCNC rejected regionalism and fought against it and the successes the party recorded at the initial stages frightened the British the more. Thus, when the first elections were held into the regional parliaments in 1951, the NCNC contested in all the three regions, unlike its regionalist's rivals, the AG and the NPC. What even astonished the British was the fact that in the election, the AG, which was created as a Yoruba party lost to the NCNC in the Western Region. The Action Group won, only 29 seats, while the NCNC won 35 seats! Regionalism was in danger. There were, however, 16 seats won by small parties and independent candidates available for negotiation.

Through behind the door negotiations, which involved some British officials, these 16 seats went to the AG. This was how the Action Group and the British succeeded in turning the electoral victory of the NCNC into a victory for the AG. Far from the NCNC working for the British, it was indeed the Action Group, which was very close to them, in this and many other instances.

But the NCNC did not relent in its refusal to reject regionalist and tribalist politics. Thus, in the next election it came out in full force to inflict a decisive defeat on the AG in the first federal election into the House of Representatives held in 1954. The NCNC won 23 seats, in the Western Region, against 18 by the Action Group. This defeat of the Action Group by the NCNC in the Western Region frightened both the British and the leaders of AG.

As a result of this significant NCNC nationalist victory, the Colonial Office, the Nigerian Government, the Action Group and the Northern Peoples Congress, NPC, made desperate attempts to cripple the NCNC, as a nationalist party in order to entrench tribalist and regionalist politics. This conspiracy to weaken the NCNC involved a proposal to merge the Action Group, the NPC and other smaller political parties together, in order to prevent the NCNC from leading the Federal Government. The evidence for this conspiracy, which had the AG and the NPC, working closely with the British, against the nationalist forces in the NCNC, comes from a top-secret report no. G.221/97, now available in the Public Records Office, in London. The Chief Secretary to the Nigerian Colonial Government in Lagos, Mr. Ralph Grey, sent this report to Mr. T. B. Williamson of the Colonial Office on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1954. The Chief Secretary reported that:

*“Abubakar [Tafawa Balewa] dropped in again this morning to report further on the “situation.” He showed me a paper, which recorded the results of his talks with Mr. Akintola and Mr. Rosoji on 16<sup>th</sup> December. (These followed an earlier meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December at which the Sardauna and someone else from the Action Group, possibly Mr. Awolowo, were present).*

*2. I glanced through the paper very quickly and wished that I had a better photographic memory. The main thing was to form a United Front Party- consisting of the NPC, AG, UNIP and KNC – under NPC leadership. All members of those parties elected to the House of Representatives would sign a declaration of adherence to the new party...*

*4. An undertaking was taken by the Action Group that they would cease to press for the Regions to be broken up into States or for an alteration in the North/West boundary...” (PRO, CO554/1178)*

As far as the colonial records are concerned, the attitude of the British Government towards the NCNC and its leader Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe did not change in any significant way as to turn the party and its leadership into stooges over an election in the Western Region, where the party was a formidable force in its own right. The British records are available on this subject and Harold Smith should bring his own evidence, which contradicts these colonial records, unless he just wants to rig Nigerian history.

#### The 1959 NPC-NCNC Alliance

It is obvious that the dislike of “the North” by Harold Smith is an extension of his dislike of the NCNC. This is particularly because the NCNC formed an alliance with the NPC against the Action Group, which he liked and

supported. His support for Awolowo and the Action Group was based on **the fact that the Action Group based its party on those of the Conservative Party of the UK. In other words, Harold Smith was quick to recognize that the AG was at that time, a conservative party.**

**This was not a coincidence because Harold Smith comes from a family, which was poor and Irish, but wanted to become English and had supported the Conservative Party in the UK. In fact, even as a poor youth, Harold Smith was active in the trade unions, fighting communists after the end of the Second World War. He went to the University of Oxford on scholarship. This was why he became an ideal material as a colonial Labour Officer in Nigeria, where the trade unions were active and had been part of the struggle for independence on the side of the radical NCNC.**

**Harold Smith made every effort to denigrate the election results from the North because of his dislike of the NCNC, whose alliance with the NPC resulted in the formation of the first independent government of Nigeria. He described this alliance as “sordid”! But what Harold Smith did was to display his ignorance of Nigerian politics of the 1950s. The NPC – NCNC alliance, to form the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1959, was a necessary outcome of the actual realities of these politics.**

**In an address delivered at the meeting of the National Executive Committee of the NCNC held in Lagos on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1959, the President of the party, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe explained the reasons for the NPC-NCNC alliance. Among these reasons was the possible break up of the NCNC because of the objection of its members from the Western Region to any alliance with the AG. There was also the issue of the hostility of the AG towards the NCNC in the past eight years, which was expressed in terms of the Awolowo Government of the Western Region seizing the house of Dr. Azikiwe in Lagos and refusing to pay compensation. The AG was also accused by the NCNC of funding its dissidents like Mr. Eyo Ita; attacking its leaders and supporting the break up of the Eastern Region at the Minorities Commission. But, above all, the NCNC were concerned about the threat to national unity at the point of independence.**

**For given the division of Nigerian politics as North verses South, it was wrong for the NCNC as a party with a national outlook to forge an alliance with the AG, which would amount to an isolation of the North. These were some of the reasons that made Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to reject the offer of becoming the first Prime Minister of an independent Nigeria under the NCNC-AG alliance. He was concerned about the unity of Nigeria and was less concerned about holding the office of the Prime Minister. The NCNC and its NEPU ally were determined to prevent what they called the “Pakistanisation” of Northern Nigeria, by the British and went out of their way to pre-empt that by becoming close to the NPC.**

**Nigerian Censuses and Northern Nigeria**

The attack of Harold Smith on the NPC-NCNC alliance also involved the attempt to discredit the Nigerian census figures especially as they related to the North. Smith writes:

*“The massive power of the North rested on the census figures produced by the British officials in early 1950s. All attempts to confirm those census figures since have proved a failure and this has become the most bitterly contested issue in Nigerian politics.”*  
(TELL, March 7, 2005, p. 41)

The last census conducted by the colonial government was in 1952, when Harold Smith was a student in the UK. So, how could he claim to know what happen in the course of the conduct of the census when he was not in Nigeria? Did he attempt to check the figures? Harold Smith should know that an autobiography involves writing about events and activities that one is involved in. He was not involved in the 1952 census and therefore had to cite his sources for the allegation that it was rigged in favour of the North.

Leading scholars on the Nigerian economic statistics, like Professor Gerald Helleiner, noted the shortcomings of Nigerian census figures, but thought that the range of error was in the region of 25%, and that the accuracy of the censuses from 1921-1952 was improving. In the three colonial Nigerian censuses of 1921, 1931 and 1952, the Northern Provinces and the Northern Region had the majority of Nigeria’s population. If Harold Smith wants to question that he should do so with reasons and evidence and not just attempt to rig the history of Nigerian censuses, by throwing around accusations, which lack any foundations.

### **The Violent Overthrow of the First Republic**

The last aspect of the rigging of Nigerian history by Harold Smith, which I would like to draw attention to, is his claim that the violent overthrow of the First Republic was brought about because of the persecution of Chief Awolowo due to the effective role he played as the Leader of Opposition. As a student of Nigerian political history, I have kept on asking, what actually went wrong with both Chief Awolowo and the Action Group?

I had to pose this question because as of the time of independence, the AG emerged clearly as the fastest growing political party in Nigeria. I have said so, because the party went a long way to transform itself from the political wing of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (The Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa), which was Western Region and Yoruba centred to a national party after, the severe defeat it received in the hands of the NCNC in the 1954 Federal Elections in its home base, the Western Region. This transformation of the Action Group becomes very clear from the electoral status achieved by the party on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Britain.

On that day, the AG was the official opposition party in the House of Representative. It had 73 out of the 312 members of the House of

**Representatives with elected members cutting across the three regions. The party had in fact, established itself as the most national political party after the 1959 federal elections by winning 33 out of 62 seats in the Western Region; 14 out of 73 in the Eastern Region; 26 out of 174 in the Northern Region; and 1 out of 3 in Lagos. The spread of its seats made the AG, the second most important political party in the East, the North and Lagos while it defeated the NCNC in the Western Region in the 1959 Federal Elections. In the case of the regional parliaments, the AG was the ruling party in the Western Region and provided the Leaders of the Opposition in both the Eastern and the Northern Regional Houses of Assembly.**

**Yet, this party and its leaders played politics in ways that led to tragedy to itself, its leaders and to the Nigerian nation. Despite this, we have people like Harold Smith exonerating Chief Awolowo from blame and responsibility for this tragedy. This is of course consistent with the worshipful attitude he now claims to have towards Chief Awolowo and Chief Enahoro.**

**In his TELL interview Harold Smith said, “*My idea of heaven would be Awo and Tony giving their ideas and advice.*” It is not clear what he would like them to advise him over, in this heaven, where he has Awolowo on one side, and Enahoro on the other!!**

**According to Harold Smith what happened to Chief Awolowo was because he was such a great politician and an effective Opposition Leader, as to constitute a great threat to the NPC-NCNC alliance government. What explanation could Harold Smith give for the failure of Chief Awolowo to keep his party together? This is an essential question because it was the break up of the AG that sparked off the Western Regional crisis, which became a major factor facilitating the violent military overthrow of the First Republic. To argue, as others have attempted to do that it was the disloyalty of Chief Akintola is definitely not a sufficient answer. To even argue that it was the NPC, or the NCNC, or both of them combined to instigate Chief Akintola is in itself an indictment of the leadership of Chief Awolowo, who had been an active politician since 1938, on the platform of the Nigerian Youth Movement. Chief Awolowo knew the Nigerian political terrain very well, and the personalities, inside out, yet he played a key role in the break-up of the AG.**

**As if this was not enough, Chief Awolowo got himself dragged into an attempt to change the Federal Government by violent means, at a time when he was leading the fastest growing political party in the country, with a decisive national spread, and considerable support in all the three regions.**

**As one of the leaders of the AG who was also a leading actor, deeply involved in the conspiracy with Chief Awolowo and Chief Enahoro, late Mazi S. G. Ikoku, stated in a conference held in Kaduna in 1993, that they were planning the overthrow of the government by force. This confession of S. G. Ikoku has been published in a book titled, *Inside Nigerian History*, edited by Drs. Bala Usman and George Kwannashie and was published by the Presidential Panel on the History of Nigeria Since Independence, Ibadan, under the chairmanship of Professor Tekena Tamuno. This is how on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June 1993, S. G. Ikoku**

responded to a question on the civilian coup attempt led by Chief Awolowo in 1962 in which he too was actively involved:

*“All I can tell you in all honesty is that we were fed up with the way the Nigerian system, the Nigerian state and the Nigerian government were operating, we were deeply committed to a change of government and we saw that waiting for elections would not produce any solution to the problem...*

*This is what we did. We started preparations for it and the preparations had gone very far and I believe we would have pulled it off. But unfortunately for us, our leader [Chief Awolowo] was so kind to the Nigeria Police that he had a police informant among his planners and so the police knew every move we were making. And so it was easy to trip us up. Well, after the act, people have been saying, there was no coup because we went to court, there was no plan to overthrow the government. Naturally, if you catch me over a coup plot and take me to court, I have to enter a plea of not guilty, I did not do it. This is normal. But then the whole thing has blown over. We served our term. We have been granted pardon, we have been rehabilitated, our leader even became the number two citizen in the country. I felt it was time to tell the country the truth, so that our history would be correct. So, all I am saying is that, yes, there was an attempt to overthrow the government. Yes, I took part in the attempt. Yes, it failed.” (Inside Nigerian History, pp. 43-44)*

No one, including Chief Anthony Enahoro, has come out to deny this confession by S. G. Ikoku, yet people like Harold Smith still go round claiming the innocence of Chief Awolowo in the political tragedy of Nigeria from 1960-1970.

### **The Motives of Harold Smith**

It is not quite clear to me as to why Harold Smith has been making attempts to rig the history of Nigeria, decades after he left the Nigerian colonial service. I could not even understand why he made an attempt to write an autobiography, since people write their autobiography to specifically bring out the contributions they made from their own point of view and the lessons to be learnt. But going through what Harold Smith wrote as his autobiography, it is clear that he has nothing to tell people about his life. I have said this because Harold Smith only worked in any serious sense for about five years in Nigeria, 1955-1960. This was his only regular employment in his whole life.

Since he left Nigeria 45 years ago, at the age 33, he was staying at home and living off his kind wife, and possibly his two daughters. It appears as if he needed to create a sensation about Nigerian politics and elections to justify his staying idle for 45 years. This must be why he has been alleging that the British Government vowed to block him from getting employment in the UK. But if he really created such a sensation in 1956, why was he kept in the colonial service

up to 1960? Why was his two-year contract renewed in 1957 and he came back to Lagos to continue with his job as Labour Officer? There are a lot of unanswered questions about Mr. Smith and his stories about Nigeria, about political harassment by the British Government and even his sickness. Mr. Smith should know that a lot of colonial primary historical materials are now available, which shed light on some British activities in Nigeria. He should stop rumbling and fumbling around, he should come out straight and clean with the truth, if he has anything truthful to tell us about British rule in Nigeria. Otherwise his motives on Nigerian political history are questionable.

### **Conclusion**

The TELL magazine has found Harold Smith's stories interesting at this time of Nigerian history when the National Conference on Political Reform is going on, to attack "the North". This must be why excerpts of Harold Smith's autobiography were published with two sensational headlines: one attacking the North, while the other threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria.

But, surely, the TELL magazine should do a better job of this, by using a more credible source. Clearly, Harold Smith has very little credibility over what he has attempted to recount as regards Nigerian political history. He has only tried to rig Nigerian history by throwing around unsubstantiated accusations about the rigging of Nigerian elections in the 1950s. But these types of accusations cannot fool Nigerians. They need evidence. Harold Smith has not provided this evidence. He has simply attempted to rig Nigerian history.

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2005.