

# Obafemi Awolowo's Allocutus

Statement by Chief Awolowo while before the High Court before  
sentencing for Treasonable Felony

September 11, 1963

*In "Adventures in Power Book One: My March through Prison" by  
Obafemi Awolowo [Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1985]; pp. 198 ff.*

I must say, and this may have to be taken up with a higher tribunal that I do not agree with your Lordship's verdict and the premises on which it is based.

For upwards of 30 years, I have been in politics in Nigeria; during this period I have operated in various important theatres in the life of this great Federation. I have, with others, fought against British imperialism with all my might, and with all the talents that it pleased God to give me. Together with other nationalists, some of whom are with me and many of whom are not with me here, we have successfully thrown out British imperialism and enthroned Africans in positions which, 20 or more years ago, they never dreamt of occupying.

I have been an unyielding advocate of a Federal Constitution for Nigeria. I have all along, with other leaders of this country, been a very active and constructive participant in all the constitutional conferences which have taken place since 1953, and which have culminated not only in the attainment of independence but in the production of a Constitution of which Nigerians are very proud.

This Constitution is now being gradually violated.

I have also fought against anything which savours of injustice. It is thus an irony of history that, as one of the architects of Nigeria's independence, I have spent almost half of Nigeria's three years of independence under one form of confinement or another.

Since 1957 I have fought, as your Lordship remarked, with vigour against

the feudal system in the Northern Region and for its eradication. I have also fought to prevent the spread of this evil political system to other parts of Nigeria. During the same period I have strongly advocated the breaking up of Northern Region into more states in order to have true federation in Nigeria, to preclude the permanent subservience of the people of Nigeria to the autocratic ruling caste in the North, and to preserve peace and unity in the country.

In short, I have always fought for what I believe, without relenting and regardless of consequences to myself. I have no doubt, and I say this without any spirit of immodesty, that in the course of my political career, I have rendered services to this country which historians and the coming generations will certainly regard as imperishable.

Naturally, Sir, in the course of my long, turbulent and active political life, I have attracted to myself a sizeable crop of detractors and political adversaries. Similarly, I have in the course of this long career seen both triumphs and set-backs; and I have met them with equal mind.

Peter, not Peter the Apostle, but Peter the hero of Hugh Walpole's novel entitled "Fortitude" said: "It isn't life that matters but the courage you bring to it." After life had done terrible things to Peter he heard a voice that said to him, among other things, "Blessed be all sorrow, hardships and endurance that demand courage. Blessed are these things: for of these things cometh the making of a man." In the words of Peter, therefore, my Lord, I declare (not that I have heard a voice): Blessed be your verdict; and I say in advance, blessed be the sentence which your Lordship may pass on me. I personally welcome any sentence you may impose upon me.

At this moment my only concern is not for myself, but that my imprisonment might do harm to Nigeria for three reasons. First, the invaluable services which I have hitherto rendered and which I can still render will be lost to the country – at least for a season. Second, there might be a heightening of the present tension which has lasted 15 months, and has done incalculable injuries to the economy of the country. Thirdly, for some time to come, the present twilight of democracy, individual freedom and the rule of law, will change or might change into utter darkness. But after darkness – and this is a commonplace – comes a glorious dawn. It is, therefore, with a brave heart, with confident hope, and with faith in my unalterable destiny, that I go from this twilight into the darkness, unshaken in my trust in the Providence of God that a glorious dawn will come on the morrow.

My adversaries might say who am I to think that if I am imprisoned the country might suffer? What if I died? The point, of course, is that I am still alive and will not die in prison. Furthermore, the spirit of man knows no barrier, never dies, and can be projected to any part of the world. This being so I am confident that the ideals of social justice and individual liberty which I hold dear will continue to be projected beyond the prison walls and bars until they are realized in our lifetime.

In this connection, I must stress that in this very court room, indeed in this dock and in the entire Federation of Nigeria, the spirit of a new Nigeria is already active and at work. This spirit, working through constitutional means which I have spent the whole of my lifetime to advocate, is sure to prevail, before very long, to the delight, freedom and prosperity of all and sundry.

Before I close, I must say that in spite of the delay of the past few weeks on the part of your Lordship in giving judgement in this case, and in spite of my disagreement with your verdict which I have just given expression to, I must acknowledge your Lordship's patience throughout the trial of this case. Particularly, I want to thank your Lordship for the due and especial consideration which you have always accorded me and the other accused persons. I thank your Lordship; and I am prepared to abide by your sentence.

**THE SENTENCE** The Trial Judge Mr. Sowemimo speaks: "...Whatever others may say, this is my personal view. I am not speaking as a judge but as a Nigerian. Here we have one of the first Premiers of the autonomous region standing trial. If you were the only one before me, I would have felt that it was enough for you to have undergone the strain of the trial. I would have asked you to go.

But I am sorry, I cannot do so now because my hands are tied. Having sentenced those young chaps whatever happens I have to pass some sort of sentence. If I made up my mind to sentence the other accused persons who I find were tools in the hands of others, and if my conclusion is right, it is for me to see that a punishment by me in my court is such that others would see that there is no preferential treatment. I do not see what useful purpose a sentence of imprisonment will do to you, but I have come to the conclusion that these things emanate from you. To get you involved in this thing is enough shame. But this is a political crime. There are things which one may never know. All I know is what is before me and I am bound by the evidence. You mentioned about the delay in giving judgement, but I

wish you were in my position and had to read some of these things – the evidence which was about 800 pages and the notes of submissions also about 600 pages. I was never hoping or thinking that I would be called upon to try a former Head of Government and Leader of Opposition. I am only happy that this is a court of first instance."

At the conclusion of the speech by Justice Sowemimo, Chief Awolowo as sentenced as follows: 1st Count – 10 years I.H.L (Imprisonment with Hard Labor) Treasonable felony, contrary to Section 41(b) of the Criminal Code 2nd Count – 5 years I.H.L. Conspiracy to commit a felony, contrary to Section 516 of the Criminal Code 3rd Count – 2 years I.H.L. Conspiracy to effect an unlawful purpose, contrary to Section 518 (6) of the Criminal Code Sentences to be concurrent