

LESSON NOTE FOR WEEK THREE

SUBJECT: HISTORY

CLASS: JSS3

TOPIC: BRITISH SYSTEM OF COLONIALISM(1)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On the 15th of February 1885, several European powers converged in Berlin in Germany for the Berlin Conference. During this conference, they decided on how to share or partition the African continent among themselves. Some of the European nations who participated in this conference were Portugal, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Hungary, Austria and Turkey.

As a result of this conference, Britain acquired Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone as colonial territories. On acquiring Nigeria, the British began to strategize on how to overpower the Nigerian people and establish a colonial government. They went into negotiations with some powerful traditional rulers and their kingdoms, got the people to sign treaties with them either tactfully or forcefully, fought wars of annexation and invited the missionaries. They combined psychological and military warfare to conquer the people.

Meaning of colonialism : Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. Colonialism is the practice **by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources** to increase its own power and wealth.

British system of colonialism

As stated earlier, the British conquered the Nigerian precolonial territories through the use of both tact and force. They conquered the Niger Delta region and got rid of stubborn rulers such as King Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Itsekiri in the process. They also occupied Lagos, expanded their authority to Yorubaland, conquered Benin which was ruled by Oba Ovoranwem in 1897 and conquered the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903.

After conquering these territories, the British colonial administration of Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. It then adopted different administrative patterns for both protectorates. Indirect rule was adopted in the North and direct rule in the South.

Indirect Rule In the North

Indirect rule refers to the system of administration in which the British governed the colonized people indirectly through their traditional rulers. Indirect rule was adopted in the North because the Northerners had a well-organized and centralized system of government with powerful emirs through whom the British could have indirect control over the people. It was also adopted because the Northerners resisted direct rule as they feared it would lead to a compromise of their cultural and religious identity due to the influence of Christianity and Western education.

Direct rule in the South

In the South, the British tried to impose the same indirect rule system but it failed woefully. This was because the South was opposed to rulership by traditional rulers. For instance, the West which

was part of the Southern Protectorate had Obas who were constitutional monarchs and the British tried to increase the powers of the Obas to mirror the absolute monarchy of the North. This was met with strong resistance by the people. There was also opposition to indirect rule in the cases of the Egbaland uprising and the Aba women riot of 1929.

This opposition led the British to adopt direct rule in the South. **Direct rule was a system of governance in which the British colonial power used its officials to directly administer the colonial Nigerian territories from 1851 to 1951.** There were Resident Commissioners who operated at the provinces and District Commissioners who oversaw the districts while the Native Court Authority was headed by a Magistrate who was usually British.

Direct rule in the South made it easy for the Southern people to quickly imbibe the white culture and civilization through the influence of Western education(schooling), Christianity, the civil service, modern infrastructure and public utilities. This created greater enlightenment among the Southerners who started elite group movements clamouring for independence before their Northern counterparts.

HOMEWORK

1. What is colonialism?
2. Describe the British system of colonialism in Nigeria.