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Alhaji Mai-Bornu Retires

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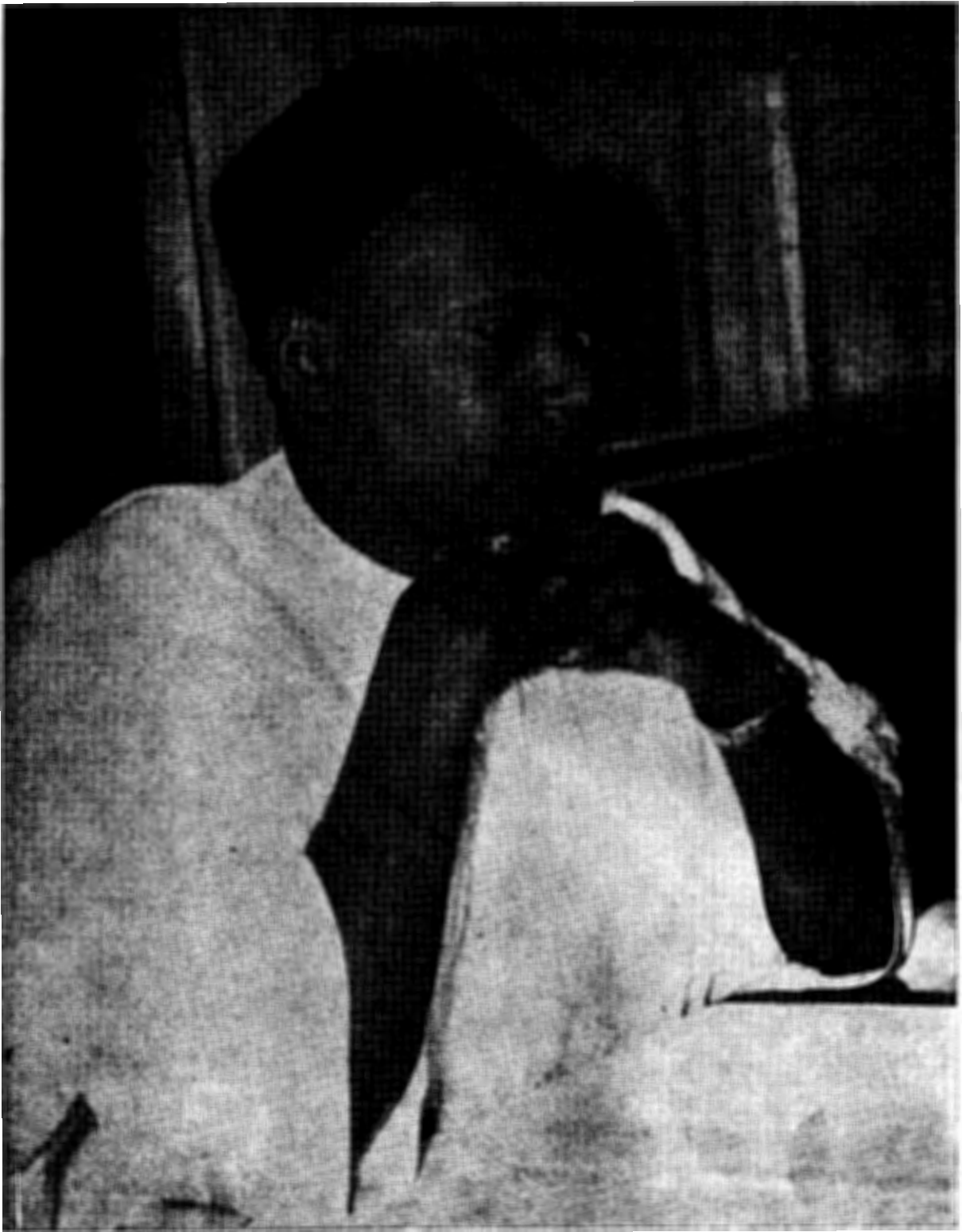


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Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu, Governor—25th July, 1963—25th July, 1967

ALHAJI MAI-BORNU RETIRES

On 22nd June, 1967, representative senior members of the staff of the Central Bank of Nigeria, at Ikeja Airport, saw the Governor of the Bank, Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu, board a Fokker Friendship plane, at 8.15 a.m. bound for Kaduna. The Governor's journey was unlike his other journeys; this was a flight which took the Governor away from Lagos into retirement from the service of the Central Bank of Nigeria. It was an emotional moment, especially when he turned on the last rung of the plane's ladder to wave good-bye, for the Governor was loved by many and respected by all.

Alhaji Mai-Bornu was born of Kanuri-Fulani parents in the Lamido Emirate of Yola on 1st May, 1919. His father, Muhammadu Mai-Bornu, was one of the Councillors of the Lamido Local Authority Area. He did not fully appreciate the importance of Western education in the new society that was slowly but surely emerging in Nigeria. Thus, although it was mandatory in the Emirate for parents to send their children to the local school, Muhammadu Mai-Bornu succeeded for some-time in keeping young Aliyu's existence from the knowledge of the Authorities, and so away from school. But a new Emir, who knew the family of Muhammadu well, ordered him to send young Aliyu to school. It was through this intervention that young Aliyu was given the opportunity to start his school career in the Yola Town Elementary School in 1932.

Misfortune struck the young pupil early in school: his father died just eight months after he had enrolled. This tragedy did not deter him from pursuing his studies. He finished the Elementary School course successfully in 1936. From Yola Town Elementary School, he enrolled at Yola Middle School. He completed the course of his studies here in another four years.

During the course of his elementary school training, Aliyu had become fascinated by the English language. Like most Nigerian youths who receive early education outside the big towns, Aliyu wanted to become a teacher, and if possible, a teacher of English—a choice that lit a lantern into the man's character: a mind with a burning desire for social change—an aspect of him that can only be discerned through close association. His choice made, he entered the then Kaduna College where he qualified in

1942 as an English language teacher or 'English Master' as it is commonly called. Great teachers have profound impacts on their students, and often help in shaping their future lives. Aliyu was one of those fortunate pupils with a teacher who evoked inspiration and aspiration. His decision to become an English Master was due to the influence of a tutor and inspiring 'English Master' from the reputable Katsina High School.

The young trained teacher returned to his hometown school, the Yola Middle School, where he taught English until 1946. From here, he was transferred to Kaduna College, where he spent six years as an English Master. While at Kaduna College, he continued his self-development through private study, carrying his education further by successfully matriculating in 1949. He joined the Northern Teachers' Association, and became interested in public affairs, as other educated and prominent Northerners of his time. In 1952, he left Kaduna College and returned to Yola Middle School as Deputy Headmaster. He left there in April, 1954, journeying to Vom where he worked as House Tutor at the Veterinary School for about five months.

Aliyu's departure from Yola in 1954 was to make a decisive mark on his future career. While at Vom, he won the Regional Government's Scholarship to study abroad. He entered Bristol University in September.

Life at Bristol was happy; it afforded Aliyu the opportunity to satisfy his burning desire for knowledge, as well as to develop further his insight into human behaviour and problems. Aliyu Mai-Bornu had no difficulty in his course. But the years at the University were not without some set-backs as far as his health was concerned. In 1957, he graduated with a B.Sc. degree in Economics before returning to Nigeria.

Back in Nigeria, he joined the Civil Service of the Northern Region as an Assistant Secretary, serving with the Public Service Commission, Ministries of Finance and of Trade and Industry. His experience in the colonial public service was not intellectually or personally satisfying. He was often considered too radical because he longed for a faster pace of change in the machinery of government and in the society around him. Soon, however, opportunity beckoned from Lagos, the Federal Capital.

The opening of the Central Bank of Nigeria

in July 1959, provided opportunities for educated young Nigerians to train as future central bankers of the country. One of the positions to be filled by a Nigerian was that of Assistant to the Secretary. Mallam Aliyu seized the opportunity and joined the staff of the Bank in this capacity in 1959.

Once in the Bank, his progress was rapid: he was promoted from the rank of Assistant to the Secretary to Assistant Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Secretary. In January, 1962, he was appointed the first Nigerian Deputy Governor of the Bank. On 25th July, 1963, Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu became the Governor of the Bank. In that position he headed the country's prime financial institution, responsible for policies which affected the economic lives of the Nigerian people.

Although Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu was Governor of the Central Bank in a difficult period for the nation, he won respect for his impartiality and personal integrity. His decisions were made after careful thought and consultation. His sincere devotion to the Bank and the nation impressed many.

As an administrator, Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu approached the problems of the Bank with enlightenment. He spared no effort or resources in promoting programmes for the improvement of staff performance and competence. Although many examples can be cited as testimony to his progressive policies, perhaps, the most outstanding was his attitude towards staff training within Nigeria and abroad. As Governor of the Bank, and fully aware of the position of such an institution in an underdeveloped country, he firmly believed that the staff of the Bank should be helped in every way possible to bring their ability and competence up to international standards. The implementation of this conviction led to a large increase in the number and variety of training schemes upon which the Bank embarked during his tenure of office as Governor.

Nigeria was fortunate to have had a man like Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Bornu to head the fledging Central Bank, and to lay the foundations both of integrity and performance that have won international praise and recognition.

The affection and respect of the staff for him were amply demonstrated on the night of Saturday, 17th June, 1967, when a farewell address was presented to him by the Staff Association of the Bank.

In his response to the address, the departing Governor said in part:

'...The past eighteen months have been a very trying period for everyone in this country. The Central Bank, as an institution, has not escaped the disruptive effects of the sad events of this period. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Central Bank for the admirable way in which they have reacted to the problems caused by these events. Throughout these difficult times the staff of the Bank have displayed a high sense of responsibility and devotion to duty. As a result, the Bank has been able to continue to perform its functions smoothly. Naturally, some members of the staff have found it impossible to discharge their duties where they are required to do so, due to circumstances beyond their control. That is why many of these members of the staff are not here with us tonight. I sincerely hope and pray that normal conditions will soon be restored so that the people of this country may live together in peace and harmony.

'The Central Bank, in its short history, has succeeded in carrying out satisfactorily the functions assigned to it by the law establishing it. The pioneers from overseas who came from the Bank of England, the Reserve Bank of Australia and those provided by the USAID did a good job in establishing the Bank on a sound footing and training Nigerian personnel to take over from them. Since their departure, Nigerians have maintained the sound principles of central banking laid down by them. I think the Nigerian staff deserve equally high praise for having succeeded in carrying on the difficult task of central banking satisfactorily all by themselves after a relatively short period of training.

'I have been very lucky to have such good people like you in the Central Bank and I am very proud of you. My work has been made easy by your co-operation, your loyalty and your hard work. The staff in each Department, whether stationed in Lagos or in the Branches or Subcentres, have carried out efficiently the tasks assigned to them. The Banking Adviser and all the Heads of Departments have willingly and sincerely co-operated with me in co-ordinating the specialized work of the various Departments and in formulating the necessary policies for the smooth running of the Bank. Our association has been very pleasant and I have enjoyed every minute of it.

'You have been very kind in mentioning the part I played towards the achievements which the Central Bank has made during my time.

However, you must remember that one man alone cannot run a big organization successfully. Success depends to a very great extent on the general attitude of those involved. I am happy to say that you have displayed the right kind of attitude required for the successful running of the Bank; and I have already mentioned some aspects of it. Therefore, the credit is really yours.

I would now like to appeal to you to maintain the high degree of efficiency in your work; the sound principle of "do to others as you

would wish them to do you" in order to keep intact the harmony which you have already established in the Bank and, above all, your loyalty to this most important institution which, by its very nature, has to discharge its functions impartially on a national basis. I would also appeal to you all to give to my successor your confidence and co-operation which it has been my good fortune to enjoy during my term of office....'