

## Periscoping Chief Christian Chukwuma Onoh's Stewardship of the Nigerian Coal Corporation, 1959-1966

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### Abstract

Coal was discovered in Enugu-Ngwo by a team of geological exploration engineers led by Mr. Kiston in 1909. Since its discovery, no further effort was made at prospecting until 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War. The colonial government, because of the difficulties of obtaining European coal supplies as a result of the war moved quickly to carry out more prospecting on Enugu-Ngwo's coal. They discovered that the coal field was a sub-bituminous one and suitable for steam raising purposes. In this regard, they commenced coal mining in Enugu-Ngwo in 1915 with the establishment of Enugu Colliery, the first in Nigeria. Since that time up till 1959, no Nigerian had been at the helm of affairs in the corporation until the emergence of Chief Christian Chukwuma Onoh. In this paper, we will explore the circumstances that led to his emergence as chairman of the corporation, the challenges he faced at the inception of his stewardship and his contributions to national development through the corporation. Primary sources which include oral tradition granted by reliable informants and source materials acquired from National Archives Enugu; and secondary sources which include books, journal articles and other un-published works will be historically analyzed using qualitative research methodology.

**Key Words:** Coal Exploitation, Politics, Leadership, Human Capital Development, Infrastructural Development.

### Introduction

The genesis of coal mining in Enugu-Ngwo was the mineral survey department established in 1903 under the direction of Mr. W.R. Dustan, the director of the Imperial Institute of Mineral Survey London.<sup>1</sup> The first finding of the survey was lignite near Asaba.<sup>2</sup> In 1908 large deposits of

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<sup>1</sup>U.S Ani "Social and Political Change in Ngwo, 1909-1983", MA Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2008, p.42.

<sup>2</sup> A. Akpala, "Background to Enugu colliery Shooting Incident of 1949" in *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol.3, No2, 1965, p. 335.

lignites were discovered at Ibusa, Okpanam, Obomkpa and Nnewi.<sup>3</sup> While the Imperial Institute was still testing the quality of the mineral for fuel purposes, large deposits of coal was discovered in Enugu–Ngwo in 1909.<sup>4</sup> The discovery was made by a team of geological exploration engineers led by Mr. Kiston.<sup>5</sup>

With the outbreak of the First World War which drastically limited European coal supplies, the colonial government carried out more intensive exploration to discover that the Enugu–Ngwo coal field was a sub-bituminous one and good enough for steam raising purposes, hence the commencement of coal mining activities.<sup>6</sup> Since the establishment of the colliery, the corporation was headed by Europeans of British decent until 1959 when Christian Chukwuma Onoh was appointed chairman. This was a major landmark in the history of the corporation.

This work will first make a brief survey of his background. This will be followed by his emergence as chairman of the corporation. It will also explore the challenges he met on assumption of office and how he was able to resolve them. Again, his contribution to national development through the corporation will be examined and finally the conclusion is drawn from the findings.

### **Brief Background of Christian Chukwuma Onoh**

Onovo, Nwa Ogbodo, Nwa Ozoude, Nwa Ozo Aniefugwu, Onoh was the first of four children born to the family of Chief Gabriel Okwor and Esther Nude Onoh of Umubonyi kindred of Enugu–Ngwo of present Enugu–North Local Government Council of Enugu State. He was born on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1927 at Ovim in Isiukwuato Clan of Okigwe Division, where his father, worked as a government salesman under the Nigeria Railway Corporation.<sup>7</sup> In the period, Church Missionary Society (CMS) had already taken root in Enugu–Ngwo, he was subsequently baptized as Christian Chukwuma – hence his popularity with C.C Onoh.

C.C Onoh enrolled into the Central School, Ngwo in 1935 for his primary education. The school was established by the CMS under the supervision of Rev. G.T Basden who was, at the time, the Education Secretary of the C.M.S in Onitsha Province.<sup>8</sup> The school was only certified to run classes from primary one to primary four.<sup>9</sup> He was just concluding his primary one in 1936 when his father, Chief Gabriel Okwor Onoh died of appendicitis at a very young age of 33.<sup>10</sup> His death created a vacuum in the politics of Ngwo Native Authority where he was an influential member, and as well his family where he was the sole provider.<sup>11</sup> Christian Onoh was just seven years old when his father died. He therefore journeyed through life with his three younger ones and mother

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<sup>3</sup> U.S Ani Social and Political change... p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> I.S Ayalogu. "Enugu Coal Industry and its Impact on Ngwo up to 1979, BA Project Report, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1988, p.17

<sup>5</sup> National Archives Enugu (NAE), This is Enugu in Anambra State, published by the Ministry of Information, Anambra state, 1980, p.2

<sup>6</sup> I.S Ayalogu Enugu Coal Industry and its Impact on Ngwo ... p.17

<sup>7</sup> Augustine Ugorji c.88 Retired Civil Servant/Community Leader, Interviewed, 30/5/2011

<sup>8</sup> NAE ONPROF 7/4/8, Application for Mission Site in Udi Division, 1918-1921.

<sup>9</sup> Pa Godwin Ude, c.83 Retired School Teacher/Banker, interviewed, 9/06/2011.

<sup>10</sup> Pa Godwin Ude, Interviewed Cited

<sup>11</sup> John Ukwuani, c. 70 Retired Army Officer, Businessman, Industrialist, Politician former Executive Chairman, Enugu–North Local Government Council, Enugu State interviewed, 20/8/2011.

who was a full-time housewife. The death of his father did not necessarily stop his education, he, afterwards resumed classes for primary two after his father's burial.<sup>12</sup> At the completion of his primary four in Central School, Ngwo, he proceeded to St. Peters Primary School, Ogbete, Enugu where he had his primary five and six classes.

At the end of his primary education which he finished with a good grade, he utilized the scholarship scheme established by Mr. Chadwick (the District Officer of Udi Division in the period) to secure admission into the Prestigious College of Immaculate Conception (CIC) Enugu in 1944.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Chadwick established the scholarship scheme to assist the children of chiefs working with the Native Authority to access secondary education. His motive of establishing the scholarship was basically to strengthen the commitment of the chiefs working under him in the discharge of their duties to the colonial government and as well to boost education in the Division. While in CIC, Christian Onoh distinguished himself as a very intelligent, hardworking and focused student; his performance in class work is a testimony to that. At CIC, two major developments, of interest took place in his life. First, he was temporarily converted to the Catholic faith being a protestant by birth and baptism. He participated actively in church activities, and became an altar boy. Secondly, he joined the nationalist struggle. Owing to his exposure to leadership, he saw injustice as detrimental both to human and societal development. He perceived colonialism as an extension of injustice on the African. Throughout the period of his studentship, he belonged to the youth brigade of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC).<sup>14</sup>

On the 24<sup>th</sup> May, the British Empire day of 1947, Onoh defied the school authority; instead of leading students to the government field for procession and other activities to commemorate the British Empire Day celebration, he diverted them to a political rally addressed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe at Day Spring Hotel, Enugu.<sup>15</sup> With Zik at the rally were Mazi Mbonu Ojike, Mr. Micheal Imodu, Oged Macaulay, Margret Ekpo, Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti and other NCNC stalwarts.<sup>16</sup> The school authority not only suspended him from school, he was also de-listed as a candidate for the Cambridge examination. He had to register the examination as a private candidate; he afterwards passed the examination with a good result.<sup>17</sup>

In September 1949, Onoh got a job with the Department of Produce Marketing and Export as a produce inspector in Ibadan. His duty alongside other inspectors was to inspect produce assembled in Western Nigeria for instance cocoa and certify them for export. They visit various collection centers to check the produce, and owing to the remoteness of various collection centers, they moved with motorcycles to facilitate their job. He had good working relationship

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<sup>12</sup> Augustine Ugorji, interviewed cited

<sup>13</sup> Mr. Chadwick was one of the most widely travelled District Officers that worked in Udi Division. He visited almost all the towns and villages in the Division, supervising the enforcement of colonial policies in the area. He built very strong synergy with chiefs working under him to the extent that he secured their commitment in implementing colonial policies, in their localities. The scholarship scheme is one of the areas, with which he (Chadwick) secured the commitment of the chiefs.

<sup>14</sup> J. Asogwa, *C Onoh; Politics and Power in Eastern Nigeria*, Idika Press, 1991 p.23

<sup>15</sup> J. Asogwa, *C Onoh; Politics and Power ...* see also C.C Onoh, *My Throny Road to the Government House* Lagos: Academy Press Ltd, 1988, pp.10-11

<sup>16</sup> J. Asogwa, *C.C. Onoh: Politics and Power...* see also C.C Onoh, *My Throny Road...*

<sup>17</sup> J. Asogwa *C.C. Onoh: Politics and Power ...* see also C.C Onoh. *My Thorny Road...*

with his predominantly Yoruba colleagues but the work did not avail him the opportunity both to express himself and as well participate in political activities. Being a very adventurous person, he found fulfillment in places where his full potentials were expressed. After eighteen months of service as a produce inspector, he resigned his appointment and joined his kinsmen in Zonkwa in present Kaduna State in March 1952 to trade on local commodities and spices. Zonkwa, being a railway station with shops and warehouses stimulated the development of market around the station. Businessmen exploited opportunities around the station to transact business different regions within the country. Onoh purchased groundnuts and conveyed them to Aba in Eastern Nigeria for sales; in turn he purchased palm oil which he sells in Kafanchan, Zonkwa, Maiduguri and other parts of Northern Nigeria. Apart from business, Onoh engaged in politics. He was an active member of the Nationalist Church of Nigeria (NCN) –a religious arm of National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) founded by Mr K.O.K.Onyioha. Mr. Abengowe the priest in charge of Northern Region, in full recognition of his activities ordained him a priest of the NCN and posted him to Kafanchan. He combined business and political activities and traversed Kafanchan, Jamaa, Zonkwa and other parts of northern Nigeria. Business was doing well until a disastrous fire accident gutted the warehouse where he stored up over 3,000 bags of groundnut and 1500 bags of ginger. Recovery was difficult especially with the drop in the international price of ginger. These two incidents forced him to return his home town in September 1952.<sup>18</sup>

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1952 CC Onoh travelled overseas for further studies. On his way, he stayed briefly at the West African Students Union (WASU) building – a beehive of nationalist activities across United Kingdom. There he met Charles Aniweta Abangwu, who was a Law student at the University Hull, before proceeding to Wales where he enrolled to study law in University of Wales in Aberystwyth<sup>19</sup>. He graduated in 1957 with second class upper result and emerged the best among eighty-seven graduates. He was called to bar in the Middle Temple of England and Wales.<sup>20</sup> He returned to Nigeria the same year

### **Emergence as Chairman of the Nigerian Coal Corporation**

On his return to Nigeria in 1957, he went into full time legal practice; he opened his chamber at No 7 Silver Smith Coal Camp, Enugu. It was not long after his entry into full legal practice that his party selected him to replace the deceased Chief Francis Mbadiwe who represented the Enugu constituency in the Federal House of Representatives.<sup>21</sup> In the period, there was a strong polarity in the Eastern Regional chapter of the party led by Hon. Charles Aniweta Abangwu, a University of Hull trained lawyer and member representing Nsukka East Regional Constituency in the Eastern House of Assembly.

The problem started shortly after he took his seat at the Eastern Parliament, he noticed that the Northern Igbo groups of Nsukka, Udi, Abakaliki and Awgu did not occupy any important

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<sup>18</sup> C.C. Onoh C. 81, Elder statesmen, Businessman, Politician, First Nigerian Chairman of the Nigerian Coal Corporation Ex Executive Governor of Old Anambra State etc. interviewed, 06/01/2008

<sup>19</sup> Charles Abangwu, c. 96, former Parliamentary Eastern House of Assembly, Former Commissioner for Information, East Central State, Traditional Ruler of Ehalamena, Nsukka Local Government Area, First Chairman, Enugu State Council of Traditional Rulers interviewed, 13/2/2011

<sup>20</sup> C.C Onoh, Interview cited, see also (a) J. Asogwa. C.C Onoh: *Politics and Power* ... p. 25; (b) CC Onoh my Thorny Read ... p. 12

<sup>21</sup> Charles Abangwu, interview cited

position in the parliament. In their first budget meeting of 1955, he also identified the extent of neglect in terms of allocation of development fund for the provision of basic infrastructures in Northern Igboland.<sup>22</sup> It was out of their complaint about minimal attention given to Northern Igboland that led to his formation of Udi, Nsukka and Awgu united Front (UNAUF) – a splinter group from the neglected areas, within NCNC. According to Abangwu, Zik decided that another Northern Igbo lawyer should join Hon. Charles Abangwu in the Eastern House of Assembly. It would cause a major shakeup in the Eastern Regional caucus of the party. Owing to the foregoing, Zik nominated CC Onoh to replace Chief Frances Mbabiwe in the Federal Parliament so as to take him out of the Eastern Nigerian Parliamentary politics.<sup>23</sup>

Barr. CC Onoh took his seat in the federal House of Representatives on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1958. By the September when the house adjourned for the 1959 election, he had made valuable contributions to national development. For instance in one of the parliament's plenary session of 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1958, he contributed in a motion moved by Hon. J.I.G Onyia, member representing Asaba constituency on the establishment of other industries connected to coal industry. He urged the Federal Government to examine the possibility of establishing a coal carbonisation industry for the production of steel, explosive, plastics, medical products, special adhesives, road making materials and most of other items used in daily life which can be produced from coal.<sup>24</sup>

He refreshed the mind of the parliamentarians on the role coal played in the development of Nigeria since 1915 when mining operations started. He noted that the energy needed for industrialization and urban development were made available by coal, likewise, the transport revolution which made the movement of goods and services across the country and even beyond very easy. He expressed fears therefore that if the Federal Government continued with the dieselization of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) and Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) which constituted the highest consumers of coal, it would signify closure of the Nigerian Coal Corporation and the folding up of all its function.<sup>25</sup> He prayed the parliament that carbonization of coal will not only lead to the sustainability of the coal industry, more jobs will be created, more resources will be generated, coal ancillary industries will also grow to stabilize the economy.<sup>26</sup> It was a brilliant presentation and the Head of Government business in the period Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa applauded his contribution.<sup>27</sup>

In the build up to the 1960 general elections, the activities of UNAUF led to the formation of Association for one Nigeria (AFON) by the non-indigenous elements resident in Enugu. Christian Onoh, owing to his positive interest in the things that will foster unity, love and peaceful co-existence of different groups that made up Nigeria, refused joining his kit and kin that made-up UNAUF and joined the AFON faction of the NCNC Eastern Regional Chapter. The high point of their activities was the Enugu urban council election of 1958 where he supported Malam Umaru Altine, a Fulani cattle dealer from Sokoto to emerge as executive

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Abangwu, interview cited

<sup>23</sup> Charles Abangwu, interview cited

<sup>24</sup> U.S Ani, "The Life and Times of Christian ChukwumaOnoh, 1927 – 2009," Ph.D Thesis, Department of History and International studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2014, p.72

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Ani, The Life and Times of Christian ChukwumaOnoh ... p. 74

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Ani, The Life and Times of Christian ChukwumaOnoh ... p. 75

<sup>27</sup> C.C. Onoh interview cited



Chairman.<sup>28</sup> He was nominated by the AFON faction of the Eastern Regional Chapter of the NCNC led by Dr. Micheal Okpara and Dr. G.C. Mbanugo for his return ticket for the Enugu constituency seat of the Federal House of Representatives. He contested the NCNC nomination with Mr. COC Chiedozi of the UNAUF faction backed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe.<sup>29</sup>

According to the party's election guideline, if two candidates got equal votes, the matter would be referred to the Regional Working Committee for decision on the choice of a candidate. At the end of the primary election, both Onoh and Chiedozi polled 12 votes each. Instead of referring the matter to Eastern Working Committee of the party, Zik instructed Chief Beyoku (the party chairman) who was not eligible to vote, to cast his vote in favour of Chiedozi as he won with 13 votes.<sup>30</sup> Every effort CC Onoh made to get justice failed, he finally appealed to NCNC National Convention that was to hold in Warri. His supporters mounted pressure in Enugu because of Zik's decision to scheme him out of the race. Before the convention, Onoh's supporters purchased machetes to foment trouble in Enugu should justice be denied him at the convention.<sup>31</sup> After the convention, Zik's decision on Chiedozi stood.

The National Working Committee of the party led by Chief Festus Okotie Eboh (the minister for finance), Dr. Micheal Okpara (the premier of Eastern Region) and Dr. G.C. Mbanugo (the chairman, Eastern working committee of the party) proceeded to Lagos with Christian Onoh to meet with Alhaji Tafawa Balewa for a compensatory position for him. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1959, the Prime Minister appointed him chairman of the Nigerian Coal Corporation.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from political reason, other reasons contributed to the Prime Minister's decision to appoint him into the position. First, it was his contribution on the carbonization of coal and diversification of its uses during the house plenary on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 1958. He understood that he (Onoh) was passionate about innovating and repositioning the industry for greater development. Another reason was that Onoh came from the locality where the coal was mined, and his constituents formed the greater percentage of the population working in the Colliery. Alhaji Balewa believed therefore, that Onoh would in this regard work passionately for the continued expansion of the industry to develop his locality.<sup>33</sup> Onoh was set for work as chairman of the Nigeria Coal Corporation.

### **Challenges Dr. CC Onoh faced as the Chairman of the Nigerian Coal Corporation**

From the inception of coal mining in Enugu in 1916 up to 1959 when he became the chairman, the management patterns of the corporation has been restructured over time. In 1916 when mining operations commenced, the management arrangement conferred the administrative and financial responsibilities of the colliery to the railway corporation but the Colliery manager had free hand in the execution of technical matters affecting the production of coal.<sup>34</sup> The condition remained until the transport directorate was established, and in 1937 the Colliery became a

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<sup>28</sup> C.C Onoh, interview cited

<sup>29</sup> Charles Abangwu, interview cited

<sup>30</sup> C.C. Onoh interviewed cited, see also, C.C. Onoh, *My Thorny Road* .. p.15

<sup>31</sup> CC Onoh, interviewed cited, see also, CC Onoh, *my thorny Road*, ...p.15

<sup>32</sup> CC Onoh interviewed cited

<sup>33</sup> Engr. Ken Onyia, c.67 Retired Civil Servant and Community leader, interviewed, 12/06/2011

<sup>34</sup> A. Akpala, "Background to Enugu shooting incident... p.34,

government department more or less independent of the railway.<sup>35</sup> But in spite of the administrative separation, the Colliery continued to depend on the Railway both as a market and as well the most effective means of transporting its products to other users.<sup>36</sup> On emergence as chairman, Christian Onoh established a vibrant marketing department charged with the responsibility of marketing coal resources. He secured full autonomy from the railway, in the passage of time new consumers were discovered which increased production and as well the revenue of the corporation.<sup>37</sup>

The most devastating condition he met at the inception of his chairmanship was the retrenchment of 3,000 workers of the corporation. By 1959 when he assumed office, the productive capacity no longer sustained the large number of Colliery workers. Majority of the workers were unskilled, therefore could not bring innovation to the corporations to the extent that would boost production with low running cost. Most of the workers too were his kit and kin, from the clans in Agbaja and Nkanu Areas of Old Udi Division and Northern Igbo (Wawa) people generally. They were not educated and were in the period living under the shadows of their more educated southern Igbo neighbours of present Anambra, Imo and Abia States who came in contact with Western education and development decades before it penetrated into the hinter land Igbo of the North.

Through wide consultation in the numerous communities, that constitute the bulk of the affected people, Onoh drew their attention to the long-term benefit of the retrenchment to their communities.<sup>38</sup> The retrenchment was imminent owing to the fact that the European managers of the corporation were not interested in exploiting other uses of coal so as to keep the corporation relevant beyond the dieselization of ECN and NRC. They did not also want to carry out the retrenchment themselves because of their fear that it might stir anti-colonial riot when they (the colonialists) were at the verge of granting independence to Nigeria.<sup>39</sup> His ingenuity and sense of diplomacy was brought to bear in the manner with which he carried out the exercise. All the retrenched workers received all their entitlements, the exercise did not cause any skirmish, rather it was accepted by the groups affected (which mostly were his indigenous people) in good faith. The people's understanding in the situation also helped him to settle down at work and make notable contribution to the expansion and stability of the industry.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J.O Ahazuem, "The Nigerian Coal Industry and the Problem of failing Coal Consumption in Nigeria" *Nsukka Journal of History Vol 1 No 1*, 1989 p. 50

<sup>36</sup> J.O Ahazuem *The Nigerian Coal Industry*.

<sup>37</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani, c.82, Retired General Manager Nigerian Coal Corporation, Traditional Ruler of Ebe in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, interviewed 26/06/2011.

<sup>38</sup> Engr. Ken Onyia, interview cited.

<sup>39</sup> Engr. Ken Onyia, interview cited

<sup>40</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani is a Cambridge University trained Mining Engineer. He started work in Nigerian Coal Corporation in 1944 after his Studies of the Collage of Immaculate Conception, Enugu. After three years of service and in-training, he was sent to study Mining Engineering at the Cambridge University. On his return he was posted as an over-man at NCC Enugu. From that position he gradually rose through the ranks until he became the General Manager in 1964. He advanced that the retrenchment was long overdue and should be embarked upon if the corporation would be repositioned for effective service. It was not Onoh's idea but a Federal Government directive. His views were not different from that of Engr. Ken Onyia and Engr. Nelson Agu a retired General Manager of NCC.

## Dr. CC Onoh's Contributions to National Development through the Corporation

Dr. CC Onoh has great interest in the development of the coal corporation. His interest was borne out of his desire for the development of the Nigeria State. He wanted to use the industry both to improve and as well fast-track the development of other sectors of the economy which would, of course stimulate general development in the country. The increased patronage of coal – a brain child of the marketing department who exposed the usage of coal to other groups, led to the opening of Ribadu and Onyeama Mines in 1961 and 1964 respectively.<sup>41</sup> This led to the employment of more miners and technical staff to meet the growing demand of the commodity. In coming to terms with the motion he seconded in the House of Representatives eighteen months before he became chairman, he commenced plan on the establishment of a carbonization plant.

He constituted a study group among colliery workers on the establishment of a carbonization plant. They were eventually sent them to London to meet with experts to widen their knowledge and improve their ideas on carbonization and alternative uses of coal. On their return, they produced a comprehensive report on the establishment of the plant. The group was led by Engr. Uche Okonkwo, a Cambridge University trained mining engineer and a member of the British Association of Mining Engineers.<sup>42</sup> The plant was established in 1964, managed by Engr. Okonkwo, the production of cooking stoves and cooking fuel had gone past experimental stage before the overthrow of the first republic which halted their activities.

Through the carbonization plant, Onoh experimented the use of coal resources for road making purposes. He constructed a 25km road that connected Okpara Mine at Akwuke with Enugu Metropolis. It is that road that opened up Akwuke, Akegbe and other neighbouring communities to Enugu metropolis. His intention was to use the carbonization plant to produce coal for the construction of major roads first, in Eastern Nigeria and to other parts of the country.<sup>43</sup> All these plans were on the process of actualization before the military struck in 1966 and he was removed as chairman of the corporation.

One of the most important things he did as chairman of the corporation was the re-positioning of the corporation for high productivity, efficient administration, and high profit with low running cost. He embarked on the training of all Colliery staff having understood that most of the miners were not educated and even their supervisors do not have the requisite knowledge that would make them efficient. Most importantly, he utilized the junior management staff scholarship scheme to train most secondary school leavers employed in the corporation. He sent them to universities in the United Kingdom to study in key areas of the mining industry so as to improve the efficiency of the corporation. For instance Engr. Nelson Agu and Engr. Emmanuel Ugwu studied Mining Engineering at Cambridge University. Both rose through the ranks to become general managers of the corporation at different times. Engineers Wilberforce Enwu, Christopher Agu, Simon Akunna studied Mechanical Engineering; Engineer Ken Onyia studied Electrical Engineering, Engineer Moses Ozoani studied surface and undersurface surveying etc.<sup>44</sup> There

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<sup>41</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani, interview cited, see also J. Asogwa C.C Onoh, Politics and Power ... p. 37

<sup>42</sup> Engr. Nelson Agu c. 74 Retired General Manager, Nigeria Coal Corporation, interviewed 22/06/2011

<sup>43</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani and Engr. Ken Onyia, interviews cited.

<sup>44</sup> Engr. Nelson Agu and Engr. Ken Onyia, interviews cited.



were others that went on short technical courses in United Kingdom and Poland. When they returned, they occupied key managerial and technical positions in the corporation. They learnt the British mining techniques and safety regulations which was among the best in the world. Their knowledge brought high efficiency in mining operations which led to increased productivity, with minimal accidents, casualties, low running and maintenance cost and high profit.

Part of the merits of the scholarship scheme was that it empowered the beneficiaries far beyond working the coal corporation. Some ventured into lecturing in Universities and Polytechnics across Nigeria, some transferred their services to Federal Ministries, while still others ventured into private practice at a high professional scale and worked as consultants for different establishments and government agencies.<sup>45</sup> After the training which built higher capacity on the workers, some intricate responsibilities which had always been outsourced to foreign experts were executed internally. During his stewardship, he indigenized all forms of contracts and sundry jobs in the corporation; this is to support the development of local industries and manpower which will, in turn stimulate and stabilize economic growth and development. It was only those contracts that were far beyond the expertise of the indigenous companies that were awarded to expatriates.

Onoh understood that Ngwo and other clans in its environs where coal was discovered and exploited had not benefited significantly from the corporation owing partly to minimal education. In this regard, he established the Colliery Technical School on nine acres of land donated by Enugu–Ngwo people. The school had three upstairs, which include the administrative building, technical workshop and Nnamdi Azikiwe Assembly Hall, nineteen bungalows which include classroom blocks of different department, laboratories, kitchen, dining hall and hostels. It also had eleven bungalows for staff residence, standard football and volley ball pitches. It was officially commissioned by His Excellency Rt Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the President of Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1964. It was among the best schools in Eastern Nigeria of the period; their curriculum was designed to build capacity of school leavers to the extent that would enable them function efficiently in different technical fields. The first principal was Mr. T.V Hence; a Cambridge University trained vocation and technical educationist.<sup>46</sup> As part of his community service Dr. CC Onoh single-handedly established the Girls Technical Secondary School Ngwo in 1965. It was setup with one long upstairs which served both as administrative building and class rooms for senior students and thirteen long bungalows some of which serve as classrooms for junior students, student's hostel and refectory; laboratories and staff quarters.<sup>47</sup> The school met the standard requirement of the Eastern Regional Government and was approved as a government school. The school was first headed by Mrs. Ada Nwadike before Ms Bernice Agbo took over in 1966. The schools gave Ngwo people and its environs access to higher education. This was one of Onoh's greatest contributions to long term development of Nigeria.

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<sup>45</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani interview cited

<sup>46</sup> This information was gathered from eye witness account during my research trip to the school. Also from a number of old boys of the school most especially, Mazi Alexander Anayo Agu who also taught in the school until his retirement as a vice principal in 1996.

<sup>47</sup> Bernice Agbo c.80 Educationist, former school teacher, Principal, Supervisor for schools. Retired Permanent Secretary Executive Office of the Governor of Old Anambra State, former Sole Administrator, Enugu-North Local Government Council, interviewed 13/04/2012. I also went on a research visit to the school and interacted with the Vice Principal Mrs. Achime who is also a former student of the school. I was conducted around the school.

## Conclusion

Dr. CC Onoh was the chairman who was really interested in the coal industry. In the words of Engr. Raphael Ani, General Manager, Nigerian Coal Corporation 1965-1975:

CC Onoh unlike other chairmen before and after him, as much as I know, demonstrated very strong interest to the growth and sustainability of the coal industry. Even after the Nigerian Biafra war when the responsibility of reviving the industry was vested on us (Nigerians) as the white experts working with us were all gone, Onoh never left us even though he was no longer the chairman. In the period, his most important concern is that he did not want the eastern Nigerians to lose their jobs after surviving a devastating war and face fresh hardship.<sup>48</sup>

Onoh's activities and actions, no doubt demonstrated that, unlike other chairmen who were only working for what they would make out of the corporation, he was interested not only in what he would make out of it but what the society would benefit through him. Though he benefited landed wealth from the corporation upon which he built some of his estates, his interest in re-positioning the corporation to improve the economy and lives of Nigerians cannot be overemphasized.<sup>49</sup> His impact as the chairman of Coal Corporation did not only cut across the length and breadth of Eastern Nigeria and beyond; it contributed greatly to economic development of Nigeria.

He invested heavily in developing the capacity of people by assisting them to acquire functional knowledge that did not only qualify them for great jobs within and outside the country but made them key players in the economic development of our country. The schools he established and the indigenous companies he encouraged were his outstanding contributions to national development.

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<sup>48</sup> Engr. Raphael Ani, interview cited.

<sup>49</sup> Obed Ani, c. 84 Landlord, Businessman, Former Chairman, Enugu – Ngwo Council of Elders.