

- The people of the Gold Coast are determined to achieve self-government

Bloodless Revolution in the Gold Coast

By George Padmore

UNLESS one visits the Gold Coast today, it is impossible for an outsider to realize the fundamental changes which are taking place in this West African colony. The country is passing through a "Bloodless Revolution" which is bound to have a profound influence on the country's future political, economic, and social structure, as well as traditional institutions and customs.

The recent sweeping victory of the Convention People's Party under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, one of the ablest politicians this country has produced, has only served to dramatize the long struggles of the Gold Coast Africans for national freedom, and economic emancipation of the country from foreign domination under British Imperialism. Ever since the chiefs and people came together to set up a

Confederacy at Mankesin in 1871, every generation has carried on the struggle up to the present time. Despite their early set-backs, the spirit of freedom has continued to burn deep in the hearts of the Akan people, only awaiting the psychological moment to reassert itself. That moment has now come, and the common people like those of other colonial lands, are determined to achieve their legitimate aspiration to govern themselves. Fortunately for them, they have found an able leader in Dr. Nkrumah to pilot them through the strains and stresses which always accompany the awakening of an oppressed and exploited race or nation.

To appreciate the real significance of the national liberation movement now taking place, it is necessary to briefly review the past. The Gold Coast, which is one of the richest territories in the British Empire, was first visited by the Portuguese in the 15th century, followed by the Dutch and finally the British. The early Europeans were slave traders and

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for over three centuries millions of Africans were stolen and transported across the Atlantic to toil as slaves in the plantations of the early American colonies and the West Indies. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, followed by emancipation in 1834, the British who had established a firm foothold in the coastal regions of the Gold Coast turned their attention to trade and commerce with the tribes inhabiting what is now known as the Colony area. In the course of their activities, the British settlers came into conflict with the warlike Ashantis, the last Akan people to enter the country from the north. After seven wars with the Ashantis, who had established a strong military confederacy in the 17th century, the British army marched into Kumasi, the Ashanti capital, and burnt the city to the ground. In 1896, the then King of Asantehene, Prempha I, was arrested, along with a number of his leading chiefs or "Nanas," and banished to the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean. Having broken the military power of the Ashantis, the British formally annexed the country, which was later united with the Colony area to form the present Gold Coast territory.

In order to placate Ashanti national pride, the British, clever diplomats, permitted the exiled King to return to Kumasi with the title Kumasihene in 1924. His successor, King Prempha II, was made ruler of the country in 1935 under the old title of Asantehene. Since then the country has settled down to peaceful rule. So much for Anglo-Ashanti relations.

ABORIGINES PROTECTION SOCIETY

The coastal tribes who had assimilated Western ideas brought in by the early missionaries, who built churches and schools in the principal towns, were launched on the way to modern civilization. But they, like their Ashanti brothers in the north, longed for the old days when they ruled themselves. To give expression to their aspirations, the chiefs and their educated Westernized subjects attempted to carry on the tradition of the defunct Fanti Confederacy by organizing the first national movement known as the Aborigines Rights Protection Society in 1898, to protect the lands of the people when the then Governor, Sir William Maxwell, introduced two land bills aimed at converting the tribal lands into Crown property.

The Society dispatched a delegation to London and was successful in their mission by getting the then Secretary of State for Colonies, that arch-imperialist, Joseph Chamberlin, father of the former Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlin, to withdraw the proposed Land Bills. Thanks to the intervention of the Society the Gold Coast tribes are still in possession of their ancestral lands. Similar missions to Great Britain were undertaken by the Society in 1911 to oppose a Forestry Bill, which was another attempt by the British administration to encroach upon their land rights.

The last delegation of the Society to visit Britain was in 1934 to protest against the iniquitous Sedition Ordinance, officially designated the Criminal Code Amendment Ordinance of 1934. On this occasion

the mission was unsuccessful and as a consequence the British have been able until recent times to muzzle the press and stifle all forms of free public expression. About the same time, the governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, set about to break the influence of the Aborigines Society over the chiefs. With the aid of an able but very ambitious Paramount Chief, Nana Ofori Atta I, head of the Akim Abuakwa State, the governor introduced the system of "Indirect Rule," which Lord Lugard, the famous pro-consul, had perfected in Northern Nigeria. Under the euphemistic name of Native Administration the country has been saddled with one of the most reactionary forms of colonial government. To effect his policy, Sir Gordon Guggisberg got Nana Ofori Atta I to pilot through the then Legislative Council the Native Administration Ordinance of 1927, amended in 1944. By this brilliant piece of imperialistic strategy, the chiefs were recognized as the principal agents of the foreign power in matters affecting the tribes.

DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

To supervise these chiefs and see that the orders of their British masters are carried out, European District Commissioners were appointed, under the direct supervision of Chief Commissioners, over the main regions of the country. These British officials are the real rulers over the Native States, for if any chief refuses to obey orders he can be dismissed by the governor even though such a man may still be recognized by his subjects as the lawful occupant of the throne or "Stool," the

traditional symbol of the Akan people.

As time went on the chiefs became more and more divorced from popular control by their people. For the system of "Indirect Rule" has endowed the chiefs with powers which they never before exercised over their subjects, who, according to tradition, reserved the right not only of "enstooling" them but "destooling" autocratic chiefs. Deriving their new powers from the British rulers, the chiefs no longer had to obey their Counsellors and the common people. They could exploit and oppress their subjects as they liked as long as they served the interest of British Imperialism.

The chiefs are today a formidable power in the land. They are organized into a sort of "Native Parliament" called the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs. Through this Council, which has no executive powers, the Aborigines Rights Protection Society was undermined and today this once powerful organization is but a shadow of its former self. And Nana Ofori Atta I who was the principal architect of "Indirect Rule" was subsequently knighted in 1928 as a reward for his service to Imperialism. Today, the system of Native Administration has been challenged by the common people under the influence of an awakened national feeling which is sweeping throughout the length and breadth of the Gold Coast. Many of the chiefs are being "destooled" by their own people, for the British Raj is no longer in a position to protect them without precipitating a serious political crisis between the British

administrators and the nationalist movement.

However, the tribesmen still retain a deep respect for chieftainship as an institution, but seem to object to only certain autocratic rulers. With the coming of the new constitutional reforms, the chiefs will be forced sooner or later to recognize the new shift of power from the hands of their foreign masters into that of the common people. Once this fact is recognized, there is no doubt that an aimable adjustment between chiefs and people will be arrived at and the chiefs restored to their former status as "constitutional rulers" over the people, subject to their conformity with traditional laws and customs.

Personally, it would be a regrettable loss to the Gold Coast should the institution of chieftainship be liquidated; for they contribute to the cohesion of the tribal bond, and guarantees continuity of Akan culture, which has many fascinating features that need preserving.

Recently, I had the opportunity of attending a conclave of the Paramount Chiefs at their headquarters in the town of Dodowa, and was highly impressed by their regal bearing. Dressed in their traditional robes of office, worn like Roman togas, surrounded by their office bearers or Linguists with golden staffs, the assembly looked like the gathering of Roman senators! In a modern democratic society where life is already too drab, the chiefs lend color and pageantry with their ceremonial attire. The Gold Coast, therefore, will be a poorer place

without the retention of chieftainship, not as agents of Imperialism and politicians, but as the fathers of their people, giving moral leadership to the new nation in the making.

NATIONAL CONGRESS

About the time when the Aborigines Rights Protection Society was beginning to disintegrate, there arose in this land the first really nationalist movement known as the West African National Congress. It was founded in 1920 by a distinguished African lawyer and statesman James Casley Hayford, whose son, the Hon. Archie Casley Hayford, is the Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources in the newly set up semi-dominion government under the leadership of Dr. Nwame Nkrumah.

The West African National Congress contributed much towards the re-awakening of the nationalist spirit during the twenties. Like the Aborigines Society it dispatched several missions to London to demand, among other things, full equality of rights for all citizens without distinction of race, color, and sex; the right of universal suffrage; compulsory free and uniform education; freedom of the press, assembly, and speech; and last but not least the establishment of a university. Today, thirty years after Casley Hayford embarked on his patriotic task, many of the Congress demands are being realized under its successor, the Convention People's Party.

The Congress unfortunately passed away after the death of its founder in 1930. But it bequeathed a rich heritage of struggle and agitation to the younger generation.

After many years of uneventful political agitation sponsored by small groups of middle class politicians, mostly lawyers and other professional men living in the principal coastal towns, there came about a reawakening or a national renaissance. This time the leadership soon passed into the hands of men and women from the common people. In the latter part of 1947, a group of middle class politicians, financed by a wealthy African merchant, George Grant, met at the town of Saltpond and formed the United Gold Coast Convention. In the same year, Dr. Nkrumah, who had arrived in London after completing his studies at Lincoln University in America, was invited to return to Africa and assume the secretaryship of the newly organized movement.

ABLE PROPAGANDIST

He was better equipped than the other members of the executive for the task, having made an intensive study of the history of the national liberation movements in India and other Asiatic countries and done practical organization work as one of the joint secretaries of the Fifth Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester, England, in 1945, under the chairmanship of the foremost Afro-American scholar, Dr. W. E. Burghart DuBois. With such a political background, Dr. Nkrumah soon proved himself an able propagandist and organizer and within a few months formed branches of the U.G.C.C. in many parts of the colony.

As his popularity grew among the common people, especially the youth,

the conservative middle class elements in the U.G.C.C. headed by a lawyer-politician, Dr. J. B. Danquah, brother of the British stooge, Nana Sir Ofori Atta, became alarmed. They objected to Nkrumah's efforts to bring the under privileged elements into the forefront of the struggle as they feared the leadership would pass from the hands of the "aristocracy" into that of the plebeian masses whom the professional classes arrogantly describe as "verandah boys"—the unwashed! Dr. Nkrumah refused to play their game of merely using the support of the common people to advance their political and professional careers in the name of nationalism. The inevitable happened when Nkrumah was removed from the secretaryship in the hope of weakening his influence among the masses whom the upper-class leaders disdained to associate with.

In 1949 Dr. Nkrumah resigned and the United Gold Coast Convention split. The overwhelming majority of the branches composed of young men who had been inspired by Nkrumah's activities broke away from the parent body leaving the rump to the "aristocrats." This marked the first clear division of the nationalist movement on the basis of class alignment. From then on the struggle against Imperialism and Colonialism was to continue with the forces divided into bourgeois and proletarian. The latter elements reorganized themselves into the Convention People's Party which soon swept through the country like a prairie fire leaving in its trail an organization of hundreds of thou-

sands. Today, the Convention People's Party, popularly designated the "C.P.P.," has a registered membership of over 1,000,000 members — the largest nationalist movement which has yet emerged in West Africa.

Viewed against the social background of Gold Coast Society, where a rising bourgeois class is smarting under alien rule on the one hand and the economic monopoly of trade and commerce by the British and Syrian merchants on the other it is not surprising that there has developed a sharp conflict between them and the less privileged section of Africans for the leadership over the masses. It happened in China and is today sharply reflected in the recent split of the Indian National Congress between the capitalists and landlord classes and the workers, peasants, and unemployed youths, who feel that they have been cheated out of their rights since India has become a Dominion republic. History is merely repeating itself in this part of Africa.

COUSSEY CONSTITUTION

With the national front divided the British have been able to take advantage of the situation to foist upon the country a pseudo-democratic constitution described by Dr. Nkrumah as "bogus" and "fraudulent!"

To understand how this brilliant stroke of British diplomacy was achieved, it is necessary to review the events leading up to the present constitutional impasse. While the politicians were carrying on their agitation for self-government, a

minor Accra chief, Nil Kwabena Bonne, organized a country-wide boycott in order to force the foreign merchants to reduce the exorbitant prices of imported goods. On the same day the boycott was called off, having achieved its purpose, a contingent of ex-service men marched from the centre of Accra to Christiasborg Castle, the suburban home of the governor. As they approached the road leading to the Castle they were stopped by armed native police under European officers. When the men refused to obey the command to turn back, the white officer in charge ordered his men to open fire. Several of the ex-service men were killed.

As soon as the news reached town, thousands of Africans who were out shopping for the first time since the lifting of the boycott started looting the foreign owned stores and beating-up all the European merchants. The rioting went on for days, having spread to other towns, until finally the governor declared a state of emergency and moved troops into Accra. When tranquility was restored, the governor ordered the arrest of six well-known nationalist leaders — Dr. Danquah, William Ofori Atta, the son of the chief, Ako Adjei, Obetsebi Lamptey, Akufo Addo and Dr. Nkrumah—and their deportation to the northern territories of the colony. They were subsequently released and allowed to return to Accra.

A commission was appointed by the Colonial Office in London to investigate the circumstances leading up to the riots and to make rec-

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in the large high school. The alternatives were clear: The school could continue to operate; it could be brought up to the white school at a cost of \$100,000; or integration could take place.

Several of the municipal board of education members held out for retention of segregation. But the city treasury would not stand the expenditure of such a vast sum as \$100,000, and the board felt extremely reluctant to be responsible for the management of an unaccredited school. The only remaining possibility was integration. But this did not agree with what some board members considered the place of the Negro in society. At this point, the municipal school superintendent stepped in and announced that he had conducted a poll of students the previous year on the matter of integration. He had found no objection whatsoever from the students to admitting Negro high school students to the white school. If the students want the Negroes in school, why should we oppose? This question was unanswerable, and the board approved integration.

The day before the school term began, ministers commented from the pulpit about the change, Civic organizations spread the word. The parents of the students were prepared for the move. This had to be done since, as one board member explained, "We are in a southern town with people who are from the South." It didn't take any explaining to the students, but the oldsters had to be handled carefully.

"There was no big fuss about the transformation, and I think that was

one of the reasons for its success," the high school principal, W. A. Foster, said.

How has it worked now that the school term is well under way? "Non-segregation has worked exceptionally well in Carlsbad's high school. There has not been one incident one way or the other," Foster said. Much remains to be done. It would have been a far more significant action had the Carlsbad school board taken this action on moral grounds rather than because of financial circumstances. But something positive has been accomplished, and the other cities with segregated schools have seen racial barriers tossed aside.

The next step calls for a realization on the part of all New Mexicans that there is a problem and that only forthright and intelligent steps can keep it from getting out of hand. Unless there is this realization, New Mexico will find itself south of the Mason-Dixon line at a point from which there is little chance of return.

BLOODLESS REVOLUTION

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ommendations for better administration. The Commission was under the chairmanship of a British barrister, Atkin Watson, K.C. It recommended among other things the reform of the existing Burns Constitution granted to the colony two years before.

The governor, acting on the suggestions of the Watson Commission,

appointed a hand-picked all-African committee, composed of chiefs and other reactionary elements, to draft a new constitution under the chairmanship of an African Judge, Sir Henley Coussey. The conservative leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention were heavily represented by lawyer Dr. Danquah, his nephew, Chief Ofori Atta II, lawyer Obeetsebi Lamptey and other executive members. Dr. Nkrumah and other radicals were excluded from the Coussey Committee.

POSITIVE ACTION

The committee made its report in 1949, after it was unanimously endorsed by all the members with a few minor reservations by Dr. Danquah and other U.G.C.C. representatives. Free of responsibility for the constitution, Dr. Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party strongly criticized its recommendations as falling short of the country's demand for immediate self-government. Backed by his party, Dr. Nkrumah appealed to the governor to convene a Constituent Assembly in order to give the common people the right to propose amendments to the draft constitution. This request was strongly opposed by the chiefs and reactionary politicians, especially Dr. Danquah and his colleagues of the United Gold Coast Convention. Assured of their support, the governor rejected Dr. Nkrumah's suggestion as Dr. Danquah had endorsed the constitution and recommended that it be given a trial.

Faced with this *fait accompli*, Dr. Nkrumah and his supporters decided to go into opposition. The

Convention People's Party convened a nation-wide conference in Accra on November 20, 1949, at which the delegates drew up a number of reforms to the constitution. These were presented to the government, which rejected them. A few months later, with the country firmly behind him, Dr. Nkrumah launched a campaign of "Positive Action" in the hope of forcing the British government to comply with the demands of the people for "Self-Government Now." Within a few days after the "Positive Action" campaign started, the Governor declared a state of emergency and struck at the radical leaders. Several members of the executive committee of the Convention People's Party including Dr. Nkrumah were arrested and sent to prison for terms varying from six months to two and a half years.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTITUTION

With the "extremists" behind prison bars, the governor set about holding the first general election. The conservative leaders of the U.G.C.C. were jubilant that their political opponents were out of the way and the road open for them to sweep into office as ministers in the Executive Council or "Cabinet." But they counted their chickens before they were hatched. From prison Dr. Nkrumah called upon his supporters to continue to fight "self-government" and to contest the elections. And a few days before the registration of candidates closed, Dr. Nkrumah and his prison colleagues were nominated as candidates. In order to discredit them and scare away the people from supporting the

C.P.P., Dr. Nkrumah was denounced as a "Communist." This move fitted in with the international "Cold War;" for if this Joseph Goebbelsian lie was believed, the government would be able to justify its repressive measures against the C.P.P. leaders on the grounds of "Defending Democracy against Communism." But the people repudiated the lying propaganda of the British and their native stooges and went to the polls on February 2, 1951, and voted Dr. Nkrumah and his party into power.

OPPOSITION DISINTEGRATING

With an overwhelming majority in the Legislative Assembly, the governor was forced to release Dr. Nkrumah and his colleagues in order to avoid a serious constitutional crisis and the breakdown of government.

Completely routed and demoralized by the superior organizational and tactical abilities of Dr. Nkrumah, the opposition is fast disintegrating into a bunch of squabbling generals without an army with which to fight a comeback. Embittered by their loss of the "big plums" in the form of large salaries which they had provided for the ministerial posts, Dr. Danquah and his one-man opposition in the Assembly is resorting to the most unprincipled tactics to try to discredit Dr. Nkrumah and his cabinet colleagues. Completely isolated from the common people whom they despise, the country is faced with virtually a "One Party" system of government until such time as a new opposition party arises.

Under the slogan: "the struggle goes on" until complete self-government or Dominion status is attained, Dr. Nkrumah, forced into the position of having to assume office, points out to his critics that it was they who advised him to try the constitution at a time when he called the country to "Positive Action" to compel the British to hand over complete power to "the chiefs and people," who are invariably linked together in nationalist agitation in this country.

Now that circumstances have forced the Convention People's Party to operate a constitution framed by Dr. Danquah and his friends, the country is awaiting the outcome of the general elections for local Government Councils, which are an integral part of the new administrative machinery, before striking the next and final blow for complete independence as a Dominion within the British Commonwealth.

There is no doubt among political observers here that Dr. Nkrumah's supporters will again sweep the polls. On the outcome of this hangs the future of the Gold Coast.

Meanwhile, the cabinet, consisting of eight African Ministers and three European officials, is getting on with plans for industrialization and agricultural reconstruction so as to lay a firm economic foundation upon which a healthy democratic society can be constructed. Within the short period of six months in office, Dr. Nkrumah has proved his statesmanship and sense of responsibility, which British and American public opinion have been generous enough to recognize.