

■ A brief sketch of how the Gold Coasters achieved their independence

A Review of the Gold Coast – Final Stage to Independence

By George Padmore

ON March 12, 1954, three years after the inauguration of the present Constitution under which the Gold Coast has been governed since 1951, the Legislative Assembly adjourned *sine die*. This marks the end of one transitional stage and the beginning of the final stage to freedom as "a sovereign and independent state within the Commonwealth."

In bidding au revoir, if not farewell to the retiring deputies, the Speaker, Sir Charles Emmanuel Quist, the distinguished African

Elder Statesman, paid a fitting tribute to the Government.

We have obtained in the Assembly, a Prime Minister in the person of Dr. Kewame Nkrumah, a capable, energetic, sincere, and genuine statesman, who with his Cabinet containing a majority of Africans, has been mainly responsible for the progress to which I have alluded. Laws have been passed establishing Local Councils and placing local government on a firm basis. Social legislation has been introduced in many forms to safeguard the well-being and prosperity of the country and education has been expanded widely. Economically, we are solvent and our last budget showed a surplus of 16 million pounds. These are achievements of which we can rightly feel proud and which should encourage us to approach and face the future with confidence.

What is this future? But first a few words about the origin of the present Constitution.

As a consequence of widespread

GEORGE PADMORE, a long-time *Crisis* contributor, is one of the world's leading experts on colonial Africa. His latest book is "The Gold Coast Revolution" (1953). He has also written "Africa and World Peace" (1937), "Africa: Britain's Third Empire" (1949), "Colonial and Colored Unity" (1945), and many other books and pamphlets.

riots arising from the shooting of unarmed ex-service men during a peaceful demonstration in Accra in 1948, the then Labor Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry consisting of three distinguished non-politicians, Mr. Aiken Watson, Q.C., as chairman, Professor Keith Murray of Oxford and Mr. Andrew Dalglish, the well-known authority on trade unionism. They recommended the scrapping of the existing Burns Constitution as being undemocratic and outmoded, although it had been introduced only two years previously by the first Labor Colonial Secretary, Mr. A. Creech Jones, and proclaimed in Fabian circles as the most advanced constitution in the Colonial Empire.

The Commissioners also advised the British Government to appoint an all-African Constitutional Committee to draft a new Constitution under which the Gold Coast should be governed. Despite the reluctance of the Colonial Office to agree to this—for it was a revolutionary proposal—the Secretary of State for Colonies instructed the then Governor, Sir Gerald Creasy, to proceed.

The Governor then packed the Committee with all kinds of reactionary middle-class lawyers, businessmen and chiefs under the chairmanship of an African High Court Judge, Sir J. Henley Coussey. Not one representative of the trade unions, farmers, and other sections of the common people was included.

In August, 1949, the Coussey Committee issued its report and after it was voted by Mr. Creech Jones' principal adviser in the Colonial Office, Mr. Andrew Cohen, now Sir Andrew Cohen, Governor of Ugan-

da, the new instrument was debated in the Legislative Council and promulgated by the Governor in 1950.

The Constitution fell short of the demands of the common people, and the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.) (organized in June, 1949 to lead the struggle for "self-government now") launched a campaign of non-violent, non-cooperation. Shortly after Dr. Nkrumah, the chairman of the C.P.P. launched his Positive Action, he and several other leading members of the party were arrested on various trumped-up charges and imprisoned.

GENERAL ELECTION

But while they were still in jail, the Governor in agreement with the moderate political leaders and the chiefs, decided to hold the first general election. Although Dr. Nkrumah had described the Constitution as "bogus and fraudulent," he advised his supporters to contest the election so as to capture as many seats as possible. In doing so, they were motivated by the idea of preventing the leaders of the reactionary and conservative parties who had helped to frame the Constitution from getting hold of the Government and working the Constitution in the way the British Government intended.

The C.P.P.'s overwhelming victory in February, 1951, spoilt all the plans and calculations of the Colonial Office and forced a retreat. So much so that the present Governor, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, was compelled to immediately free Dr. Nkrumah and his colleagues and call upon the C.P.P. leader to form the Executive Council, the main instrument of Government.

MIXED-BAG ASSEMBLY

The Coussey Constitution was so framed as to establish a mixed-bag Legislative Assembly. It consisted of 84 members of which 75 were elected, 3 ex-officio, and 6 members representing foreign interests (commerce and mining).

The ex-officio members—the chief government secretary, the financial secretary and the attorney general, as well as the foreign capitalist representatives—were all appointed by the Governor. The others were selected in the following manner: Five municipal members were elected in a single-stage election by universal adult suffrage; 33 rural members were elected in a two state election by adult suffrage exercised through electoral colleges; 19 members from the Northern Territories were elected by a special electoral college composed of chieftain nominees; 18 members by the Territorial Councils of Chiefs representing the Colony area, Ashanti and South Togoland, under United Nations Trusteeship exercised by the United Kingdom Government.

The Speaker was elected by all members of the Assembly from among themselves or from outside the Assembly. The present Speaker was not a member of the Assembly at the time of his election, but was the president of the former Legislative Council. He was elected by unanimous vote.

The Executive Council, now called the Cabinet, consisted of 11 members. Eight of them are Africans, holding portfolios of Commerce and Industry; Labor, Mines and Co-operatives; Agriculture and Natural Resources; Education and Social Wel-

fare; Local Government and Housing; Communications and Works; Health; and Economic Development. The three British Ministers hold the key portfolios of Defense and External Affairs and Finance and Justice.

The Constitution as originally framed made no provisions for the premiership. The Colonial Office experts never anticipated that any one party would emerge as the dominant party in the Assembly. The plan was to play one group of leaders off against the others and for the Governor with his officials and chiefs to hand pick the Cabinet and set the pace. Having selected one African to lead the pack, he was to be officially described as "Leader of Government Business."

But Dr. Nkrumah refused to play the game, so Mr. James Griffiths, the Labor Colonial Secretary had to get the Constitution amended to recognize Dr. Nkrumah, Prime Minister *de jure*, in order to get his co-operation in working the Constitution smoothly. This change was instituted early in 1952.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS

With the initiative firmly in Dr. Nkrumah's hands, backed by an overwhelming majority in both the Assembly and the Cabinet, the Prime Minister immediately set out to introduce long overdue economic and social reforms outlined in the Government's Development Plan. And within the short space of three years, the C.P.P. has been able to bring about the remarkable changes referred to by the Speaker at the closing session of the Assembly. The Gold Coast financial position has

never been sounder and the country is now ready to embark on the final stage to independence.

How has this come about? At every stage of the struggle, Dr. Nkrumah, who never loses personal contact with the masses, has relied upon the support of the common people. He never makes a move before consulting public opinion, which the C.P.P. is constantly educating in the spirit of democratic socialism.

Having demonstrated beyond any doubt that the African, given the opportunity, is capable of governing himself, the Prime Minister announced in the Legislative Assembly in October, 1953, that as a result of an exchange of views with Colonial Secretary, Mr. Oliver Lyttelton, who visited the Gold Coast in the summer of that year, he proposed to present to the British Government a demand for complete self-government.

But before doing so, he invited all members of the Territorial, Municipal and Local Government Councils, political parties, trade union, co-operatives and farmers unions and other public bodies and prominent citizens to submit their views in writing on questions of constitutional reform.

The response was tremendous. Led by the press, the entire country reacted enthusiastically. After all the views and suggestions were submitted and collated, the African members of the Cabinet drafted proposals which were published as an official White Paper setting out in detail the demands of the people for a new Constitution.

The draft document was then presented to the Assembly, and debated. The members then endorsed a

motion introduced by the Prime Minister to "authorize the Government to request that Her Majesty's Government, as soon as the necessary constitutional and administrative arrangements for independence are made, should introduce an Act of Independence into the United Kingdom Parliament declaring the Gold Coast a sovereign and independent State within the Commonwealth; and further, that this Assembly do authorize the Government to ask Her Majesty's Government, without prejudice to the above request, to amend as a matter of urgency the Gold Coast (Constitution) Order in Council 1950, in such a way as to provide inter alia that the Legislative Assembly shall be composed of members directly elected by secret ballot, and that all Members of the Cabinet shall be members of the Assembly and directly responsible to it."

While negotiations between the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Colonies were being carried out through the Governor, the Assembly approved plans for dividing the country into 104 constituencies and enacted legislation to deal with other electoral arrangements. So that by the end of the last session of the Assembly in March, the Prime Minister was able to announce that a general election would take place in the summer.

NKRUMAH CONSTITUTION

In accordance with the decision of the Assembly that all members of the new Parliament must be directly elected by secret ballot, chiefs and representatives of foreign commercial and mining interests, as well as British official nominees of the Gov-

ernor were excluded.

The incoming Assembly therefore consists of 104 popularly elected members; in keeping with British parliamentary practice, the leader of the party which wins majority of seats is called upon by the Governor to form the Government.

Furthermore, as the official representative of the Crown, the Governor will no longer preside over Cabinet meetings, and will act only on the advice of his Ministers, who will be collectively responsible to the Assembly. The Governor, however, will continue to exercise control over defense and external affairs until such time as the United Kingdom Parliament passes an Act of Independence conferring full sovereignty upon the Gold Coast. He will be assisted in the execution of these functions by a Deputy Governor. On the other hand, the portfolios of justice and finance now held by British officials will be transferred to African ministers.

Apart from selecting his own Cabinet colleagues, the Prime Minister will also have the right to nominate Under-Secretaries who will be attached to each Ministry. They, unlike the Permanent Secretaries, who will continue to be civil servants, will be drawn from the Legislative Assembly.

This, briefly, is the structure of the Nkrumah Constitution under which the first general election was held on June 15. The outcome of this event decided not only the future status of the Gold Coast, but the possibility of peaceful transformation of other African territories from dependencies to self-governing member States within the Commonwealth.

The Gold Coast represents a hope and inspiration to Africans everywhere, but has aroused alarm and despondency in certain imperialist circles in Britain and South Africa.

In a recent interview with the influential American journal, *U. S. News and World Report*, Dr. Malan, the high-priest of racialism, voiced the fears haunting the South African *herrenvolk*. "Democracy is a good thing, but a nation has to be educated up to it," he pontificated. "In the Gold Coast (where Britain has granted self-government) over 90 per cent of the voters are illiterate; they can't read or write. If you give democracy to such people, the result must ultimately be a reversion to barbarism and chaos."

While Dr. Malan preaches hatred and contempt for colored peoples and seeks to extend his domination over Africans by demanding the annexation of the Protectorates of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland, his contemporary, Dr. Nkrumah, proclaims his faith in the Brotherhood of Man. On his release from prison in 1951, the Gold Coast leader let it be known that he will not tolerate racialism in his country.

"I came out of jail into the Assembly without the slightest feeling of bitterness to Britain. I stand for no racialism, no discrimination against any race or any individual, but I am unalterably opposed to Imperialism in any form."

PLOT MISCARRIED

Despite the fact that within the short period of three years the Gold Coast people have travelled fast and far along the road to complete self-government, the struggle is not yet

over. Final victory has yet to be won.

Already attempts are being made by the forces of conservatism and reaction operating inside and outside the Gold Coast to discredit the Prime Minister and his Government.

Recently, a leading chief by the name of Braimah, who, although not a member of the C.P.P. was included in the Cabinet by Dr. Nkrumah as a gesture of friendship and solidarity with the Chiefs of the Northern Territories who selected Braimah to the Assembly, resigned after having confessed to the Governor of accepting bribes. He then proceeded to accuse the Prime Minister of having received the gift of a Cadillac motor car and 40,000 pounds from a Syrian contractor for a road contract for which the man was only to be paid 10,000 pounds for his services by the Government.

This fantastic allegation was not only repudiated by Dr. Nkrumah, but the Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Governor, declared that there was no evidence to support Chief Braimah's allegations. The Prime Minister was completely exonerated by the Commission.

However, even before the findings of the Commission had been made public, the chief, having failed to discredit the Prime Minister, joined forces with other opponents of the C.P.P. to organize a separatist, tribalist organization called the Northern People's Party to break up the unity of the Gold Coast.

The Chief is said to have been encouraged in this "Pakistan" manoeuvre by certain British officials serving, in the Northern Territories, where the majority of the natives are Muslims.

THE PARTY SYSTEM

Commenting upon the exploitation of the religious sentiments of the people for political ends, the Prime Minister has stated that "The Party system has come to stay. It is only through the Party System that Parliamentary Democracy can be maintained. But the C.P.P. in accordance with progressive forms of government everywhere is opposed to the formation of political parties on a basis of racialism, tribalism and religion, and will make use of every legitimate means to combat it. In our country, with its tradition of religious tolerance and respect for all faiths, it is highly undesirable that a religious association or denomination should take on itself the character of a political party. If it does so, the public are liable to associate its religious tenets, be they Christian or Muslim, with its political aims and to withhold from such a religious movement the tolerance which is given to purely religious sects."

The election was hard fought. For in addition to the newly formed Northern People's Party with its Islamic appeal, there was the fanatical Muslim Party led by the best known Gold Coast Communist, Mr. Bankole Renner; the United Gold Coast Convention led by Dr. J. B. Danquah, the doyen of African politicians; the Ghana Congress Party led by Dr. A. K. Busia, lecturer in Sociology at the University College; the National Democratic Party led by Barrister Ollennu; the Ghana Nationalist Party, led by Barrister Obetsebi Lamptev; the Ghana Action Party, led by Dr. Ansah Koi, a medical practitioner.

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French, German, Irish; then woman, Indian and European; and the church and the city. The last chapter is on the Brazilians.

On Negro influence Dr. Schurz writes:

"Except for those who were influenced by the 'racial' philosophy of the Comte de Gobineau, few Latin Americans of our time have questioned the net worth of the Negro as an ingredient in the national society of their countries."

"Nowhere else," he says, "save in the western end of Hispaniola, did the Negro influence so profoundly the shape of civilization as in northern Brazil." Yet, he adds, "Brazil is not a paradise for people of color."

A valuable and tremendously informative book which every American interested in his South American neighbors should read.

BRANCH NEWS

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a strong belief in the Heavenly Father. He seemed to gain strength from his firm beliefs and from his prayers. The world is a better place because Harvey E. Parham lived in it. The Lord has called him to rest but his name will continue to mean freedom and oppor-

tunity to people all over the state of Missouri. Though his body has gone to rest, the soul of Harvey Parham still lives in our midst, serving to inspire, to encourage others to take up where he has left off, to continue this struggle towards freedom.

GOLD COAST

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All parties mobilized their resources to win as many seats as possible. Some of the opposition parties amalgamated in order to form a "united front" against the C.P.P. But Dr. Nkrumah may again returned to office. His party had already won the majority of seats in the three recent municipal elections for the Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi-Sekondi Town Councils.

June 15 was an historic day in the Gold Coast bloodless revolution.

HOW TO DESEGREGATE

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possible, against any school board in the state which does not act in good

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