

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

PBM - 42
The National Liberation
Movement versus Nkrumah

Hotel Lisbon
Accra,
Gold Coast,
British West Africa
May 23, 1955

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The southern section of the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Colony, is moving towards self-government with the single-mindedness of a hungry matron heading for a platter of hors d'oeuvres. The Legislative Assembly has voted a sum of \$2,800,000 for the face-lifting of Accra in preparation for the big day, a several-hundred-thousand-dollar hotel (100 rooms and 100 baths) is going up in open land just east of downtown Accra, and most of the British Civil Servants have made up their minds whether to stay on as Gold Coast Civil Servants or leave after July 31 this year.¹ The latest informed guess on the approximate date of self-government puts it in late 1956 or early 1957.

Independence is busting out all over, from the African service station attendant across from my hotel who refuses to serve cheeky white men to the post office red tape which pushes you from queue to queue in the best Johannesburg tradition. Adlai Stevenson popped in the other day on business² and reassured everyone that the eyes of the world, particularly African eyes, are on the Gold Coast--as indeed they are. Prices are ruggedly independent--the gouging Frenchmen who manage luxury palaces in Pointe Noire, French Equatorial Africa, would have nothing but admiration for the brazen robbery committed by the owner of my hotel who charges even more staggering rates for a pair of unrepainted and unrepentant Army barracks and a mess hall.

This is all very nice--but in the province of Ashanti, to the north, this rich diet of independence is resulting in a case of indigestion which, ignored and minimized by the Government here in Accra, may develop into a kind of political appendicitis which could cripple the country economically and cause a long delay in the actual granting of self-government by the British--especially if the British Army has to be called upon to quash trouble.

The standard reaction here in the Gold Coast Colony and Accra to the Ashanti unrest is an all-encompassing pooh-pooh. It's the normal reaction; Accra is strongly behind Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party and, naturally, Nkrumah's C.P.P.-dominated Legislative Assembly. It is a well-known fact that a great majority of members of the Legislative Assembly representing Ashanti have not visited their districts since the general election last year for fear of being mobbed by disapproving constituents. Indeed, a reliable source who asked not to be named told me that the Prime Minister (Nkrumah) has flatly forbidden a few of his extra-unpopular cabinet ministers to risk open violence by returning to their homes in Ashanti. The Governor, Sir Charles Noble Arden-Clarke, has been bare-faced in his support of the Convention Peoples Party and, as a result, got himself stoned during a recent visit to the Asantehene, paramount chief of the Ashanti. Arden-Clarke, incidentally, returned to the United Kingdom week before last to find that the Ashanti organization, the National

-
1. A Civil Servant, who is staying on, told me that as far as he could tell about 20 per cent of the British Civil Servants have elected to leave.
 2. Rumored to be concerned with getting an American finger into the proposed Volta River aluminum project for some unnamed client.

Liberation Movement, had sent a cablegram to the Queen asking that Arden-Clarke be kept out of the Gold Coast.

An Ashanti here in Accra, Baffour Awuah,¹ told me that the National Liberation Movement consisted of "a small group of opportunists, looking for power and money for themselves." He went to great pains to get me to believe this, restating it in different ways for about an hour and a half. He was so emphatic, in fact, that I was more eager than ever to drive the 175 miles from Accra to Kumasi to see the Ashanti situation for myself, for Awuah is head of the CPP "intelligence and propaganda" section and his vehemence was an indication that the National Liberation Movement was being considered a serious threat to the Convention Peoples' Party's domination of the Gold Coast political scene.

The drive to Kumasi takes about four and a half hours--first you drive through the coastal plain for 15 or 20 miles, then you climb a sharp escarpment to find yourself in a green rolling country dotted with old stone villages and blanketed with forests. The tarred road is smooth and the weather is pleasant at this time of the year, the beginning of the rainy season. From time to time you see small, green-leaved trees standing beside the road with brownish pods sprouting from their trunks. They're worth a second glance; the trees are cocoa trees and the pods are filled with the white, pithy segments that make the Gold Coast the world's largest single producer of cocoa, providing one-third of the world's chocolate. More than half of the Gold Coast's cocoa comes from Ashanti, a fact which makes this current political squabble important to the country's economy.

As you get near Kumasi, you begin to see flags flapping from bamboo poles; parallel stripes of green, white and red for the Convention Peoples' Party and a more complicated flag made up of green and black quarters divided by a yellow cross for the National Liberation Movement. Already there have been knock-down, drag-out fights over these flags among the younger elements on both sides, something like goal post battles after Ivy League football games except with more serious intent.

I stopped at the police barrier outside town, waited until the car was searched for arms and ammunition, then drove down the main avenue. Kumasi was bristling with flags, and as I moved along the shop-lined streets looking for the office of the man I was to stay with I counted 27 N.L.M. flags and 15 C.P.P. Not a safe indication of the relative strengths of the two organizations, but enough to tell me that Baffour Awuah was justified in being worried. Several times I saw World War II American jeeps painted in C.P.P. colors filled with tough-looking young men in steel helmets. There were policemen everywhere, not only the local traffic officers in blue uniforms, but police from the rural areas wearing khaki, red fezes and broad red sashes under their black leather belts. They are good at breaking up fist fights but have proved powerless to prevent the dynamiting of the houses of C.P.P. officials and absent members of the legislative assembly. They carry rifles and bayonets slung at their belts. Kumasi had all the signs of a town in trouble.

The biggest difference between the leaders of the C.P.P. and the N.L.M. are those of age and adherence to traditional authority. The C.P.P., in Ashanti as well as along the coast, is made up of young men who took eagerly to the anti-tribal propaganda of an Nkrumah just returned from study in the United States and the United Kingdom. They are symbolized by the new civil servant, a young, reasonably well-educated person who runs his office on almost-too-efficient, inflexible lines. In the old days they would have been nobodies, cut off from power by the hierarchy of chiefs and subchiefs, elders and juju men. Today they are important, and have taken over a large part of the power formerly held by older men.

1. Baffour is more of a title than a first name; it indicates that one of Awuah's grandparents or great-grandparents served as a general of one of the Ashanti armies which caused the British so much trouble back in the nineteenth century.

Places for the old men have been found in the C.P.P., but they are positions of little or no power and do not come coupled with pleasant, well-paid jobs in the public service. Chiefs have lost their power and their incomes, the former going to local elected councils and the latter to the government, which has set up special marketing boards to handle the sale of cocoa and gold and to see to it that more than half the profits go into the Gold Coast treasury. Nkrumah has done his best to get the young people to place loyalty to the country and to the C.P.P. over loyalty to the tribe. In short, it is detribalization on an organized, speeded-up basis.

Reaction was bound to come, and it is logical that the reaction has come strongly from Ashanti. Ashanti was the big power in the Gold Coast for many generations both before and after the coming of white men. Occupying the richest part of the territory, it fought and beat almost every other tribe in this part of west Africa. Its organization was strong, its religious beliefs were tremendously binding, and its influence was felt throughout the territory. Every Ashanti was bound by a common loyalty to the golden stool¹ of the tribe and to the Asantehene, the title of the paramount chief of Ashanti who occupied the stool.

During the wars between the Ashanti and the British, which began in 1807 and continued off and on until 1901, the British tried many times to destroy the Ashanti unity as symbolized by the golden stool. But in the end they were unsuccessful, although they did manage to beat the Ashanti and bring them under British rule. In a way, Kwame Nkrumah has tried to do the same thing by reducing the Asantehene to a figurehead, depriving him of income formerly provided by the "stool lands," and putting him on a salary controlled by the C.P.P. Until a few months ago, Nkrumah was successful. His C.P.P. won all the Ashanti seats in the Legislative Assembly at last year's general election and he managed to find comfortable party niches for many of the influential Ashantis who might have otherwise formed a reactionary opposition group based on Ashanti tradition.

But about three months ago the National Liberation Movement began. It is significant that one of the leaders of the N.L.M. is Joseph Apiah, the African barrister who caused such a stir by marrying Sir Stafford Cripps' daughter, Peggy, in England. He returned to the Gold Coast a little too late to jump aboard the Nkrumah bandwagon and was therefore cut out of the cabinet post which, he told me, had been promised him. Many of the leaders of the National Liberation Movement that I met in Kumasi were formerly members of the C.P.P. It is obvious that many of them left Nkrumah because of disappointment, but they could not have organized such a strong movement in so short a time on simple disappointment.

While I was in Kumasi, I talked with R. R. Amponsah, General Secretary of the National Liberation Movement; Joseph Apiah, lawyer and organizer for the N.L.M.; Tsiboe, owner and publisher of the pro-N.L.M. newspaper, Ashanti Pioneer; Sam Arthur, editor-in-chief of the Ashanti Pioneer; John Poku, head of the Ashanti Farmers' Association (the N.L.M. farmers' group); and Baffour Osei Akoto, Ashanti Senior Linguist² and leader of the National Liberation Movement. From these men I learned the aims and grievances behind the N.L.M.

The keystone of the N.L.M. structure is loyalty to the Asantehene and the golden

1. The golden stool, which no white man has ever seen, is supposed to have been handed down from god, Onyame, to the Ashanti people during the time of the first Asantehene, Osei Tutu. The stool contains the spirit of the whole Ashanti nation and is the symbol of Ashanti unity. In 1899 a bloody war, the last of a long series of wars between the British and the Ashanti, was fought because the British tried to seize the golden stool.
2. By tradition, the Senior Linguist is the only man permitted to speak directly to the Asantehene. Obviously, the Senior Linguist in the old days was a man of great power, but although he still enjoys great prestige today, the Asantehene can be addressed personally by ordinary mortals without the Senior Linguist's intercession.

stool. This means restoration of power and income to the Asantehene, recognition of other chiefs and sub-chiefs, and a switch to government by older and presumably wiser men rather than administration by elected youngsters. The N.L.M. does not advocate complete return to the old ways but, like Lituli, president of the African National Congress in South Africa (PBM-29), urges a combination of the better aspects of both the old and the new forms of government.

Out of this grows the N.L.M. demand for a federal form of government and a specially-elected constituent assembly to draw up a constitution for it. The movement's leaders say that Ashanti cannot reconcile itself to becoming a part of a unified Gold Coast on a par with the uncivilized Africans in the Northern Territories and the smaller, less important tribes in the Gold Coast Colony. They claim that Ashanti is the only group in the Gold Coast that has a common culture and a common loyalty. It must be preserved, they say, and the only way to accomplish this is by creating three separate states ("like the United States") with a weak central government to handle external affairs. They realize that Nkrumah is strongly opposed to this and would never let such a plan go through the present C.P.P.-controlled legislative assembly¹; hence the demand for a specially-elected constituent assembly. The National Liberation Movement firmly believes that it has gained enough support in the past few months to control the constituent assembly through the Ashanti delegates and the splinter party delegates from the Northern Territories and Togoland who have already pledged support to the N.L.M.

The N.L.M. claims that Kwame Nkrumah is becoming a dictator. This is obviously a political squawk and naturally can't be proved. The leaders point out that all those who have been appointed to government jobs and who have taken over government agencies are C.P.P. members. Somehow I was not surprised at this. The leaders also say that Nkrumah has delayed holding long-overdue local council elections in Ashanti because he is afraid of the power of the N.L.M. This may well be true; the local council elections have been postponed for unannounced reasons and in a few by-elections which did not need governmental approval, the N.L.M. has made a clean sweep in Ashanti. The claim was also made that when, in three and a half years' time, new general elections should be held, Nkrumah will pass a simple resolution through the Legislative Assembly prolonging the life of the incumbent Assembly for another four years, declaring the move in the country's interest. This is a serious charge, supported only by the claims of the leaders of the N.L.M. who said that Nkrumah told them this while they were still members of the C.P.P.

The N.L.M. wants more of the profits made on the sale of cocoa to go to the farmers instead of to the Government. This plank in the movement's platform has pulled a large number of the Ashanti cocoa farmers into its ranks. In connection with this, the N.L.M.'s stand was strengthened while I was in Kumasi when the Cocoa Marketing Board, obviously under instructions from Nkrumah, raised the price of cocoa from 72-shillings a 60-pound head load to 80 shillings. It was apparently a move designed to woo the farmers away from the N.L.M., but it backfired. The 72-shilling price was decided on after long, serious debate a few months ago in the Legislative Assembly and a statement was issued then to the effect that the price would not be changed for at least four years. When the Cocoa Marketing Board calmly announced the price increase two weeks ago without giving any reasons, the N.L.M. propagandists logically argued that perhaps the 72-shilling price wasn't as necessary to the financial well-being of the country as the Government had made out. And that perhaps the price could go even higher, without being debated in the Legislative Assembly.

In connection with the Cocoa Marketing Board and, more especially, the Cocoa Purchasing Company, the N.L.M. claims that the C.P.P. is riddled with corruption. I

1. Nkrumah has stated time and again that the present Legislative Assembly, elected last year, was voted into power on a self-government ticket. Therefore, he states, there will be no new election and no new Assembly, Legislative or Constituent, until self-government is granted.

met farmer after farmer in Kumasi who told me hair-raising stories of being forced and bribed to sell their cocoa to the Cocoa Purchasing Company, a private company organized with Government funds to buy cocoa from the farmers and sell it to the Cocoa Marketing Board, the Government agency which is the only authorized seller of cocoa to overseas buyers in the Gold Coast. I was told that the Cocoa Purchasing Company also grants loans to cocoa farmers and charges high rates of interest that never appear on the Company's books. The Company is also supposed to misuse its funds, giving most of the profits to the Convention Peoples' Party. There were also stories of agricultural officers accepting bribes for not cutting out cocoa trees still bearing fruit though stricken with deadly, contagious swollen shoot disease. And other stories of agricultural officers threatening to cut down perfectly healthy trees unless paid off ("dashed") by the farmer.

There is reason to believe that many of these charges are true. The Cocoa Purchasing Company has not issued a financial statement in two years and the Government has added to the fires of suspicion by ignoring pleas from responsible quarters for the setting up of a commission of inquiry to find out just what goes on in the Cocoa Purchasing Company. A good friend of mine here in Accra, representing an American corporation, says flatly that the Purchasing Company is "rotten all the way through."

True or not, the N.L.M. has done a good job of spreading the word throughout the farming areas of Ashanti and in Kumasi itself. The Movement's leaders claim that if there were an election tomorrow, 19 of Ashanti's 21 Legislative Assembly seats would certainly go to the N.L.M. and the other two, representing Kumasi, could go either way. These seats together with those of the Northern Peoples' Party from the Northern Territories and a few opposition seats from the Trans-Volta, Togoland area, would be enough to outnumber the C.P.P. in the Legislative Assembly.

Experienced observers here in Accra say they think the N.L.M. probably could grab two-thirds or three-fourths of the Ashanti seats, putting quite a dent in the C.P.P. majority. Nkrumah is apparently well aware of the power of the N.L.M. The large numbers of policemen in and around Kumasi and the preparedness of the British Army to be sent north from Accra prove it. Nkrumah's attempts to win the Ashanti back to the C.P.P. are obvious; the rise in the cocoa price and a more recent offer to raise the salaries of all "important chiefs" by \$140 a month couldn't have been anything else.

It is doubtful whether the Ashanti can be won back now; the seeds of suspicion have been sowed and the drums of Nationalism have been beaten. The position of the C.P.P. in Ashanti was summed up for me in a conversation I had with Awusu, the deputy chairman of the Kumasi Town Council. "I am a member of the C.P.P.," he said, "but as an Ashanti I must support the golden stool and the N.L.M."

And another snatch of conversation stands out in my mind. I was talking to Sam Arthur, the editor of the Ashanti Pioneer in his office. "If Nkrumah brings self-government without first listening to our demands," he said, "the Ashanti will fight; many of us will lose our lives." He seemed to mean it.

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin