

**WEST AFRICAN  
FERMENT**

by

*Marjorie Nicholson*

2/-

A FABIAN COLONIAL BUREAU  
PAMPHLET

## THE AUTHOR

*MARJORIE NICHOLSON* has been Assistant Secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau since 1945 and is the author of the pamphlet *Self-government and the Communal Problem* and of numerous articles on colonial affairs. In 1949 she visited Nigeria to conduct classes in the Eastern Provinces for adult students, working on behalf of the University of Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies. Since 1934 she has followed Indian developments closely, particularly the building of the national movement and the events preceding the transfer of power in 1947. She says, with reference to this pamphlet, that it is impossible for one person to write a satisfactory pamphlet on West Africa, but there is something to be said for attempting to express a single view.

**NOTE** This pamphlet, like all publications of the *FABIAN SOCIETY*, represents not the collective view of the Society, but only the view of the writer. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.

July 1950

**WEST AFRICAN  
FERMENT**

by

***Marjorie Nicholson***



FABIAN PUBLICATIONS LTD  
11, Dartmouth Street, S.W.1

and

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD  
14, Henrietta Street, W.C.2

LONDON

RESEARCH SERIES No. 140

# CONTENTS

	Page
I. ANALYSIS	3
II. FOUNDATION	7
1. Political	7
2. Cultural	11
3. Economic	13
III. CONSTRUCTION	17
1. Economic Development Since 1945	17
(a) The Resources Available	17
(b) The Development Plans	19
(c) Government Economic Action	22
(d) Need to Revive Planning Conception....	25
2. Political Development	27
(a) Social Basis	27
(b) The Post-War Disturbances	29
(c) The Stages of Constitutional Advance	31
(d) The Gambia and Sierra Leone	32
(e) The Gold Coast and Nigeria	34
(f) Local Government	39
IV. THE INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE	40
Map	6
	by J. F. Horrabin

## I ANALYSIS

'One of the major events of the age is Asia's coming into her own,' said Pandit Nehru in his address to the Indonesian Parliament on June 7, 1950. How long will it be before the same will be said of Africa? For West Africa, at least, it should not be long. Africa is the last of the continents to come within the orbit of modern European civilisation. South of the Equator, Europeans and Indians have entered as settlers, but in West Africa, for climatic and political reasons, European settlement has not been possible in the past and will not be possible in the future. In West Africa, therefore, the contact between Europe and Africa will not produce a new culture derived from Europe, as in the Americas or in Australia; instead, it is producing a partial breakdown of existing African culture, with a consequent transformation of the whole.

This is a process which is inevitably accompanied by social and political tensions of the kind which we have already witnessed in Asia and experienced in Europe. But in some ways, the situation in West Africa is very different from that which arose in Asia. British power in India was established gradually, during roughly the hundred years from Plassey to the Mutiny—a hundred years in which Britain herself developed into a major industrial power and carried through the first stage in the transformation of her aristocratic Parliamentary institutions into the mass democracy that we know to-day. India itself was the seat of a civilisation much older than Britain's, India's technical development was much further advanced than West Africa's, and her culture, though seriously undermined, withstood the shock of the European impact with surprising stability. In West Africa, by contrast, the establishment of political power has come late—late for West Africa, because it was preceded, on the coast at least, by three centuries' disintegration under the slave trade, and late for Britain, because British institutions are themselves now much more highly developed than when the British connection was made with India. Thus primitive societies, still tribally organised, received the full weight of a country which is technically and politically one of the most advanced in the world, at a time when they were themselves undergoing social collapse.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>This was not the case everywhere in West Africa, but it will be understood that in a short pamphlet it is not possible to list, where an area the size of West Africa is concerned, all the exceptions which should be taken into account in weighing any general statement.

The full weight is only now being felt. It is no longer a question of carrying on fairly independently under a British-directed administration and leaving the major economic enterprises in the hands of foreign investors. To the conceptions of political democracy which nineteenth-century Britain spread about the world, twentieth-century Britain has added the conceptions of social democracy. Not only are Africans being brought into the administration and organising themselves on a scale previously un contemplated. They are expected to participate in voluntary village development and mass education campaigns, to subscribe funds for students to go to England or America, to combat soil erosion, to accept only part of the price for their cash crops and leave the rest to be spent by some faraway board, to cut down cocoa trees affected by swollen shoot but still bearing, to pay direct taxes, to vote as individuals, to talk to visiting UNO missions, and even to draw up constitutions. These things are all happening at once. They mean that Government—and Government of an advanced kind—is reaching right down into the lives of ordinary men and women, most of whom are still living in small and, by comparison, rudimentary, social units. Thus, as compared with the contact between Britain and India, in West Africa the cultural gap is much greater, the weight of the impact much heavier, and the extent of the alien influence more widespread.

There are two further differences of considerable importance. The transfer of power to a colonial territory presupposes that a local administration exists which is capable of carrying on, and that a national movement has been built of sufficient strength to sustain the political direction and organisation of the newly-independent country. In India, these two conditions were fulfilled after a very long period of development: the first Indians were admitted to the senior branches of the civil service in 1864 and the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. When the British withdrew in 1947 practically the entire civil service was already in Indian hands, and she had experienced men ready to man both provincial and central government. Even her army is commanded by Indian officers, and her statesmen have made a major contribution to international politics. Indian independence marks a landmark in West African political advance. 'If the Indians can govern themselves,' the West African newspapers ask their readers, 'why can't we?' In the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the slogan SGN (Self-Government Now) has already been raised, by contrast with India, where the Congress did not demand full independence until 1929. West African politicians are not willing to go through either the long-drawn out struggle which took place in India, or the slow process of development which took place in Ceylon. Though West Africa has much more ground to cover, it has to be covered with greater speed.

This is not only the desire of West Africans. It is the desire of Britain also. Whatever may be the public or private intentions of the British Government, there is no mistaking the mood of the British people. Even if it were necessary, we could not go through again the kind of repression which was used against the national movement in India. The desire to govern at that price no longer exists. Government in any case is becoming more difficult. Social changes in Britain have undermined the old basis of the colonial service. A higher standard of security in Britain means also less willingness to move abroad, while the difference between the opportunities available to the children of the civil servant who goes abroad and the one who stays at home increase daily. Nor are there any longer the private incomes which used to cushion the imperial proconsul. Ever higher salaries and allowances are required to entice administrators and technicians of the highest order into the climate and conditions of West Africa, but at the same time African nationalist temper is rising, and the attack on the European standard of living grows more bitter and more sustained. Moreover, colonial servants are no longer certain of what they are supposed to be doing. The mood of questioning which has afflicted every department of European life in this century has afflicted colonial servants also. A lack of moral direction is not disastrous in the stable conditions of Britain, but it takes on a quite different character in a colonial context. If Africans are to be subject to alien rule, at least their rulers must believe in their mission. The alternative is to believe in the Africans—a state of mind which depends rather on African than on European achievement. Thus we—both British and politically-conscious Africans—find ourselves in an exceedingly dangerous situation. Self-government has been promised and must come. It must, when it comes, be sustained by adequate economic and social institutions. It is not possible to achieve it without any strain. The ferment has started in West Africa; the problem now is how to avoid an explosion.





## II FOUNDATION

### I. Political

Everywhere in British West Africa, except in Togoland and the Cameroons, British political power followed the Portuguese.

An expedition sent by Prince Henry the Navigator arrived in the River Gambia in 1455. In the following year, they went again, and cast anchor at an island where, symbolically as it were, one of their number died of fever. Subsequently, Portuguese settlements and churches were established. In the slave trade period which followed, Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, Swedes and pirates and adventurers of other nationalities, rivalled one another in the Gambia as they did along the whole West African coast. 'Factories' and forts were established, which frequently changed hands, but for the most part European penetration was confined to the coasts and to the lower reaches of the rivers. In 1816 the settlement of Bathurst was established on land ceded to the British Government by treaty with the local chief, and from this nucleus British rule was established in the Gambia, with territorial extensions as more treaties were made. In 1902, by the Protectorate Ordinance, the whole of the Gambia except the Colony area round Bathurst was brought under the Protectorate system. The same pattern of a small Colony backed by a much larger Protectorate is found in each of the West African dependencies.

The first recorded English voyage to the Gold Coast was led by Captain Windham in 1553. The expedition went on to Benin for pepper, but lost so many men from fever that the survivors—40 out of 140—returned to England. They had, however, bought sufficient gold near Elmina for others to follow in their tracks. The first English fort was built in 1631 at Kormantine, and later others fell to the British from the Danes, the Dutch and the Portuguese. There were periods of rule by successive companies of merchants, interventions in the local inter-tribal warfare, and an assumption and later abandonment of authority by the British Government, before the Gold Coast Colony was established on the coastal plain in 1874. Ashanti was not finally annexed until 1901, and in the same year, following treaties made with the most important local chiefs in 1897, a Protectorate was declared over the Northern Territories.

Unlike the Gold Coast with its mines, Nigeria had little of great value to offer the early traders except its people. Captain Windham's preoccupation with pepper was soon supplanted by concentration on the slave trade, in which Britain gained a major

share by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. But with the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807, attention was gradually turned to the 'legitimate' trade, principally in palm oil, and the numerous expeditions to discover the course of the Niger led to the opening up of the interior to commerce. The slave trade went on, under Spanish, Portuguese, American and Brazilian flags, but a British naval squadron operated along the coast, and British ships were concerned mainly with produce. No forts were built, for the traders were able to operate from hulks anchored in the creeks and when Lagos was attacked in 1851, it was from the sea. In 1861, after ten years of abortive efforts to stop the slave trade without actual occupation, a treaty was signed, and in 1862 the Colony of Lagos was proclaimed. From Lagos, British influence subsequently spread throughout Yorubaland. For trade on the Niger and in the delta, the United Africa Company was established in 1879, and later became the Royal Niger Company, chartered in 1886. Numerous treaties were signed with the chiefs of the rivers, and the area was internationally recognised as within the British sphere of influence by the Conference of Berlin in 1885. The Oil Rivers Protectorate was accordingly proclaimed in the same year, stretching up the Niger to Lokoja and along the Benue. By the time the Royal Niger Company's Charter was revoked in 1900, the Company had already established a form of control over considerable areas in Northern Nigeria. These became the basis of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The Fulani emirates were reduced in the early years of this century, but it was not until 1914 that the northern Protectorate was united with Southern Nigeria in the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, with Sir Frederick Lugard as its first Governor.

The origin of Sierra Leone differs from that of the other three territories. There were the same visits of slavers, pirates and priests, the same activities of British warships, but the Colony itself originated in settlement. In 1788 the local chiefs ceded a portion of the Sierra Leone Peninsula to the British Government, and it was used by the Sierra Leone Company, which sprang from the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, to settle a mixed community of Africans who had come from America to England during the War for Independence, been rescued from slave ships, or had come from Nova Scotia. The last group included 550 Maroons who had fled from their masters in Jamaica. Clarkson was appointed the first Governor of Freetown in 1792, and from time to time British footholds in other parts of West Africa were placed under the surveillance of the Sierra Leone Governor, until their areas were separately established as described above. More land round Freetown and Sherbro Island was ceded, and the whole settlement was declared a Crown Colony in 1808. During the nineteenth century, British influence was gradually extended over the

area now known as the Protectorate, which was declared in 1896, but was never settled.

This brief account is sufficient to show the arbitrary character of the present boundaries in West Africa. A glance at the map, indeed, indicates that the frontiers have been determined by the various Anglo-French, Anglo-Liberian and Anglo-German frontier agreements rather than by geographical or tribal divisions, since people do not settle in oblongs and squares. This has caused great hardship to the tribes which have been split and are now subject to two diametrically opposed political policies in British and French territories. The most glaring examples occur in Togoland and the Cameroons, both of which were German territories before the Great War, and after it were wantonly divided into British and French areas, held under mandate from the League of Nations. They are now held as Trust Territories, for which Britain and France are accountable to the United Nations, but their boundaries have not been altered. Another major result of the arbitrary boundaries is the difficulty of uniting the different parts of the territories. Each is administratively divided into Colony and Protectorate, and there is no natural unity amongst the people.

Politically, the people of West Africa were at numerous different levels when the British came. Only a few examples can be given. There were the powerful, mediæval Fulani emirates in Northern Nigeria, lying adjacent to areas in which 'pagan' tribes still live at a primitive cultural level with political institutions on a tribal scale. In South-eastern Nigeria, none of the tribes has established for itself any but very small-scale organisation. The very competent Ibos, who number between three and four million, have never built up any system of government to cover even the whole tribe, but have remained scattered in village groups which are only now being politically, not administratively, united through their tribal unions. The Yoruba, on the other hand, were organised under kings, and established a powerful and extensive state under the Alafin of Oyo whose authority, it is thought, extended at one time from the Niger to Accra. Dynastic quarrels and civil wars broke up this state after 1810. The Gold Coast produced its most striking political unit in the Ashanti Confederacy, which was built up, from the end of the seventeenth century, on a military basis, with the Golden Stool as its religious and political symbol of nationhood. The strength of the Confederacy was demonstrated in successive wars—the British were directly or indirectly involved in six of these in the nineteenth century alone, and consequently dissolved the Confederacy in 1873. It was re-established in 1935, when the head chief of Kumasi was allowed to assume the old title of Asantehene, which he still holds.

Not only were there great variations in the size of political units throughout West Africa, but also in their character. The

Moslem emirates were despotic, but in the Gold Coast the selection of chiefs was more or less democratic. At the opposite end of the scale is to be found the extreme 'democracy' of the Ibos, so extreme that Miss Margaret Green commented of the village of Umueke Agbaja that in 1937 there was 'no one who can be described as a chief or headman.'<sup>1</sup> A different structure again was found in the Kingdom of Benin, which was a powerful kingdom when the Portuguese visited it at the end of the fifteenth century, but, despite the nominal absolute power of its ruler, fell increasingly under the authority of fetish priests. It is fair to say that everywhere, before the introduction of Christianity, political and religious powers were either very closely linked or indivisible, though the character of both differed considerably between the Moslem and 'pagan' areas.

The gap between West African institutions and twentieth century British secular mass democracy is obviously very wide. The West African institutions are based on the family, village or tribe, not on the individual. They cannot form the basis for a political structure covering the whole area of a territory in which the people are divided into several or many tribal groups. Nor can they be adapted to a fluid society, for they make no provision for the man who moves away from home into an area where he is a stranger. In many places, the institutions are autocratic; in others, even where chiefs are chosen by popular consent, their status is naturally above that of their people, and it is argued that it is degrading to them to sit side by side with non-chiefs in legislative councils; and where there is democracy, it is direct, not representative,<sup>2</sup> and consequently applicable only to small areas.

Moreover, native institutions do not function independently. Behind the paramount chief, the emir, the headman or the village council, there stands the British official, who advises or directs according to his personal character and the local circumstances. It is for this reason that the system of 'indirect rule, which works through local institutions, is to-day being questioned even as a method of local government. It has never been a method of territorial government, which has in every case been based on the British administration. If self-government is to be established, that steel frame will be withdrawn. It cannot be replaced by local official government, since that presupposes a unifying power which does not exist independently of the steel frame. It must be replaced by political institutions, for which local systems of

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibo Village Affairs*. M. M. Green. Sidgwick and Jackson. 1947. Page 74.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Green records: 'Even within a kindred there would be complaints that only the senior man was called for discussion, and why should he be singled out?' *Op. cit.* page 75.

government do not provide a basis. Whether it can be replaced by Parliamentary representative democracy is often questioned in view of the short period of British rule and the absence of local foundation. Certainly, as recent constitutional discussions in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria have shown, to build such a system in West Africa means overcoming numerous and formidable obstacles.

## 2. Cultural

Slave-traders and administrators have not been the only Europeans to cause disintegration in British West Africa. The missionaries have done their share of undermining.

This pamphlet is not concerned with the validity of the Christian religion or of the beliefs which it has displaced in the minds of thousands of West Africans but with the political consequences of the introduction of Christianity. It has been said that 'the most momentous of the intellectual changes which ushered in the modern world' [in Europe] was 'the secularisation of political theory'.<sup>1</sup> In a secular state, changes in religion may occur without necessarily destroying the fabric of society. But where this secularisation has not taken place, as is the case in Muslim and West African 'pagan' societies, the new religion is incompatible with the maintenance of the old social and political ideas and institutions. In the 'pagan' areas, formal education has been in the hands of the missions, now assisted by Government grants, with the result that the young intelligentsia is ideologically, though not necessarily emotionally, cut off from the traditional exponents of moral and political authority. Moreover, education has been given by the missions without reference to social status, so that some who are still known as 'ex-slaves' are better educated than the free born. Law, marriage, inheritance, property, the control of schools, the position of chiefs, the place of native custom, a hundred-and-one things which concern the state, are intimately concerned with the religion of the people. Christianity has cut at the very roots of tribal society. Those who used to be 'all of one mind' are now divided and uncertain.

Christianity's spread has also sharpened the division between the Muslim and non-Muslim areas. It is particularly noticeable in Nigeria that western education has spread to a greater extent in the south, where the Christian effort has been largely concentrated, than in the north, where Islam has maintained its stand. Since the administration is British, entry to the civil service has

---

<sup>1</sup> *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Pelican Books, 1938, page 23. R. H. Tawney citing J. N. Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius*, 1916.

been easier for the Southerners than for the Northerners trained on Arabic; since the new political life is dominated by European ideas, the pace is made by the Southern politicians. There was a division between the two areas before Christianity came, but then the Muslims regarded themselves as superior. They still do, no doubt, but they also feel that they are being politically outpaced.

The missions have, in fact, set themselves the superhuman task of destroying and then rebuilding the foundations of West African life. They are no longer concerned with merely catechist education—such examples as the C.M.S. Niger Mission's Agricultural Centre at Asaba and the literacy experiment conducted by the C.M.S. and the Methodists amongst the Temne in Sierra Leone are only two of the numerous examples that could be given of the extension of mission work to the basic educational needs of the people. Their health work, covering leprosy, maternity services and the smallest ailments, is too well known to require more than a mention. Where missions have been long established, as in Calabar, where Hope Waddell's small party landed in 1846, their presence is visible in the people themselves for miles around.

If and when the Christian missions conquer the whole of the available 'field,' they will have succeeded in establishing a new moral basis for West African society. It is quite unlikely that they will ever do this in the Muslim areas, but even elsewhere, at present, no single basis exists, and the lack of direction is painfully obvious. Only the scarcity of schools prevents the problem from arising in an acute form in the education system. But if mass education is carried out on a wide scale, as is intended, schools will be demanded by millions of people who may or may not want them to be run by the missions. Ultimately, if thousands of government schools are established, the first question will cease to be 'How can we pay?' and will become 'What shall we teach?' Dr. Aggrey's formula of 'the head, the hand and the heart' may require interpretation beyond the orbit of Christianity, and what that interpretation should be is a baffling problem.

The new University Colleges in the Gold Coast and Nigeria will also have to face the problem. The oldest university institution on the Coast was a Church Missionary foundation, Fourah Bay College, in Sierra Leone, founded in 1827. But the new colleges, if they are to give a lead in the cultural integration which the West African territories so badly need, cannot be purely Christian in character, nor can they follow 'the godless institution of Gower Street,' for the people are basically religious. West African culture will be systematically studied, and no one can say what effect this will have in the field of religion. All that can be said at present is that something new must emerge. It is to be hoped that the immediate material need for doctors, engineers, etc., will not be

allowed to dominate the scene. The departments dealing with West African Studies have a mass of historical, linguistic, archæological and anthropological work, already carried out, on which to start. They will work at the highest level. Education in their traditional heritage is also needed at the popular level, and here the Extra-Mural Departments, attached to the University Colleges at Ibadan and on the Gold Coast, but for some obscure reason to the Technical College in Sierra Leone, have also an immense part to play. These are the important departments on which attention should be concentrated. Technicians can be trained anywhere, but cultural integration can be achieved only in West Africa.

This matter is urgent. African writers and artists are already emerging who see this, and some of the politicians acknowledge it. The emphasis on the tradition of Ghana<sup>1</sup> in the Gold Coast, the Oduduwan<sup>2</sup> revival amongst the Yorubas of Western Nigeria, the African National Church movement in Eastern Nigeria, are all conscious or unconscious manifestations of the need for a new cultural basis. They carry their own dangers, particularly the danger of splitting the populations, but they show the need. Immense work has already been done in the academic field; but it has not reached the people. The Government of Nigeria has grasped the importance of work at a popular level through its Public Relations Department, but there is little evidence that the same conception has penetrated official circles in the other territories. What West Africa now requires is a conscious effort to draw together the innumerable threads of the cultural pattern that is now being woven.

### 3. Economic

In the economic, as in the political and cultural fields, the European in West Africa has the feeling of living in two or three centuries at the same time. Judged by British evolution, there is a late seventeenth century atmosphere. Mercantile capital is in existence, but comparatively little of it has been invested in productive enterprise. It goes instead into the pockets of African, Syrian and Indian traders, into a high standard of living for the European and some African employees of foreign firms, and into Liverpool and London. Its by-product is the grave social inequality which in Europe led to revolution. The mass of the population

---

<sup>1</sup> The ancient kingdom in the Western Sudan from which, according to some authorities, some of the Gold Coast peoples have sprung.

<sup>2</sup> Odudua is the Yoruba goddess who may be said to represent the female aspect of the creator. (See Parrinder: *West African Religion*, Epworth Press, 1949, page 34 and seq.).

are at an economic stage much earlier than even the seventeenth century. Then there are the early nineteenth century, with a growing working class and nascent trade unions, and the twentieth century, with aeroplanes and press lords and cinemas, and government enterprise and capitalist monopoly.

Apart altogether from the strain imposed on the entire population of living in several worlds and several centuries at once, there is the important fact that one century, the eighteenth, has been omitted. In West Africa, the industrial revolution has not happened, but the *products* of that revolution are there for all but the most isolated and most primitive to see. Nor has the agrarian revolution which preceded the industrial revolution occurred. Except in the colony areas and the relatively small areas taken over by the Crown in the protectorates, West Africans have not lost their land. Under a peasant farming system, there have been great economic achievements, but even the most successful—the Gold Coast cocoa—is now paying the price for this organisation, and would go down altogether in the fight against swollen shoot were it not for the existence of a Government which has enforced the cutting out of diseased trees, compelled the industry to set aside funds for price maintenance, and provided for research. Yet the cocoa industry has gone far beyond the primitive land tenure which still prevails in large parts of British West Africa. Capital has been invested and land has been sold even to 'strangers',<sup>1</sup> and wage labour is employed. Many other areas are still cultivated by 'a man and his wife with a hoe', who, as Sir Philip Mitchell pointed out in Kenya,<sup>2</sup> do not provide an adequate foundation for . . . a high standard of living and elaborate social services.'

This becomes an even more acute problem because the visible standard of economic excellence in West Africa is unrelated to this background. The *actual* background is not observed, except by the minority of Africans who have been to England or America. The African who wants to 'drive a car like the white man' cannot be expected to see behind that car the long chain of development from James Watt's kettle to Detroit or Cowley, or to know that this development was preceded and accompanied by the dispossession of the entire British working and lower middle classes, and paid for with capital accumulated from enclosed land as well as from the profits of the wool trade, the fruits of the slave trade

<sup>1</sup> Not always to the best advantage—'Land is falling more and more under the control of money-lenders and absentee landlords'—C. K. Meek, *Land Law and Custom in the Colonies*. Oxford University Press, 1946, page 175.

<sup>2</sup> *General Aspects of the Agrarian Situation in Kenya*, 1946. Government Printer, Nairobi, page 12.

and the pickings of Bengal. Yet no one would wish the peasants of West Africa to go through a similar process of dispossession. They must retain their land, and economic improvement must be made within this context.

This clinging to the land also hinders foreign capital investment in productive enterprise. In 1920, Lord Leverhulme was prevented from establishing oil-palm plantations by the Nigerian Government's refusal to alter local land tenure restrictions on sale or long-lease letting. He estimated that by plantation methods the yield and quality per tree would be more than doubled.<sup>1</sup> Lord Leverhulme therefore went to the Belgian Congo, and Nigeria's palm oil continued to be collected by peasant farmers. The industry survived, nevertheless. Yet Nigeria is now to be faced with competition from plantation-produced oil in Malaya.

The relative absence of foreign-financed productive enterprise means that foreign investors appear to West Africans in the worst possible light. Their wealth has been made in trade, not production, with some exceptions in mining, timber, prospecting for oil. West Africa's ground-nuts, rice and cocoa have been grown by the Africans themselves, and they have been marketed over roads and railways built by governments, by native authorities and by the people. It is true that the rivers and the ports were opened up by the companies, and that the import and export-trades depend almost entirely on them, but they would have little to trade in if Africans did not produce.

The companies have brought West Africa into world trade. This has made it possible for Gambians to ride bicycles, for Gold Coast farmers to drink tea, and for Nigerians to wear wrist-watches. It has also subjected West Africa to the shocks and alarms of the outside world. The price of cocoa does not depend on Kumasi, but on New York and Brazil. Dollar allocations depend, not on dollar earnings in West Africa, but on dollar deficits in India and the West Indies. The cost of living goes up and down, not only according to drought or floods, but also according to wars in Europe, the price of British cotton or the revival of Japanese industry. The average West African—like the average Englishman—is unfamiliar with the world market. If anything goes wrong, he blames the Colonial Office, the Government or the United Africa Company. In this he is quite right, since all important economic decisions are taken for him by one or other of these institutions.

The United Africa Company provides the economic justification for the extreme view that the British Empire 'is an insane

---

<sup>1</sup> *Unilever's Africa*—article in *Fortune*, January, 1948.

mixture of freedom and slavery'.<sup>1</sup> With the freedom to the strong accorded by the free enterprise system, Lever Brothers and Unilever has become one of the largest corporations in the world. Its subsidiary, the United Africa Company, was born of a merger of the old Niger Company, previously bought by Lever's, and its principal competitor, the African and Eastern. From the Niger Company it inherited the agreement made in 1900 when the Royal Niger Company's Charter was revoked, under which half the mineral royalties of Northern Nigeria were to be paid to the Company for 99 years. In 1900 tin was known to exist, but the location of the fields had not been discovered.<sup>2</sup> This drain of royalties to London has evoked such hostility in Nigeria that when, this year, the Nigerian Government bought out the U.A.C.'s remaining 49 years' rights for £1m., the National Emergency Committee<sup>3</sup> objected to any payment being made and demanded the refund of all royalties paid since 1900. In the Gold Coast, where, after the war, high cocoa prices meant plenty of money to spend, but there was little to spend it on, the allocation of scarce imported goods on the basis of 'past performance', a principle accepted with little protest in Britain, led to attacks on U.A.C. premises in 1948, since it was practically impossible for other firms to break into its trade. No one has yet made any satisfactory suggestion on how the grip of 'the Octopus' can be broken.

This unhappy history dominates the West African attitude towards investment from outside. How the West African territories are to accumulate capital for investment on a scale sufficient to raise the standard of living, and whether an appreciably higher standard can be combined with peasant agriculture and a tenacious clinging to the land, is difficult to see. How social services are to be built up, on the scale demanded, with the revenues at present available, is beyond comprehension. Yet the desire for these things is the motive power which drives West Africans forward.



---

<sup>1</sup> E. Ita, *The Assurance of Freedom*. W.A.P.I. Press, Calabar, Nigeria, 1949, page 31.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Alan Burns, *History of Nigeria*, Allen and Unwin, 1948, page 157.

<sup>3</sup> Formed by leaders of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons and the Nigerian Youth Movement after the Enugu shooting of November 18, 1949.

### III CONSTRUCTION

#### I. Economic Development since 1945

At the end of the war, all the West African Governments were under-staffed, and the administration had, necessarily, been allowed to run down. Though the position has greatly improved, many officials are still grossly overworked, and many posts requiring high technical qualifications remain vacant. There was also a shortage of consumer goods, which sent up the cost of living in all territories, and of capital equipment—the most obvious examples being the shortage of locomotives and ships which held up the export of groundnuts from Nigeria and of bananas from the Cameroons. The four Governments were therefore called upon to work with inadequate tools. They also had to meet new demands. Ex-servicemen, many of them technically trained, returned with no intention of going back to their villages, and their absorption into employment took some time. Wage demands, both European and African, were made on a large scale—in Nigeria, in 1945, there was a mass strike of minor Government employees—and increases were granted by the major employers of labour, the Governments and the European firms. There have been successive increases in allowances and wages for Government servants in all territories, and many other strikes, though none reaching the magnitude of the Nigerian strike of 1945. But the rising cost of living, accentuated by droughts, is due also to increased concentration on cash crops instead of food crops, and therefore cannot be met by short-term remedies. Moreover, the more widespread political consciousness engendered by the war and the changed attitude in Britain towards Government intervention in economic affairs combined to emphasise the need for a sustained attempt at economic development.

#### (a) The Resources Available

The following table,<sup>1</sup> gives some indication of the size of the problem which faced West African Governments:—

---

<sup>1</sup> Figures from *Annual Reports* and *Colonial Office List 1949*, whichever is the later. Figures for the Gold Coast include Togoland under British Trusteeship, and those for Nigeria include the Cameroons under British Trusteeship. The revenue and expenditure figures for Nigeria exclude C.D. and W. grants. The Gold Coast expenditure figure includes £lm. transferred to sinking fund. All the population figures are estimates.

Territory	Area sq. mls.	Population	Annual Revenue £	Annual Expenditure £
Gambia ... ..	3,964	(1948) 229,284	(1947) 681,882	(1947) 631,082
Sierra Leone ...	27,925	(1947-8) 1,850,910	(1948) 2,649,000	(1948) 2,172,000
Gold Coast ...	91,690	(1948) 4,095,276	(1947-8) 10,245,618	(1947-8) 12,252,760
Nigeria ... ..	372,674	(1947) 23,000,000	(1946-7) 14,041,404	(1946-7) 13,108,412

Included in the revenue sums shown above, Colonial Development and Welfare Grants<sup>1</sup> amounted to £117,000 in the Gambia, and £141,500 in Sierra Leone. Additional to the Nigerian figure, the C.D. and W. grant was £791,034.

Far too large a proportion of these pathetically small revenues was raised by indirect taxation. Public opinion has always been against direct impositions, but the present arrangement bears hardly on the poorer sections of the population, and relies too much on export and import duties, which are subject to fluctuations in overseas trade. Of the amounts shown above, £338,882 was provided by customs and excise in the Gold Coast, and £7m. (51 per cent.) in Nigeria. Taxes and rates contributed £148,963 in the Gambia, £992,000 in Sierra Leone, £3,011,257 in the Gold Coast, and in Nigeria, £2,500,000 (18 per cent.). In all the territories, income tax is difficult to assess and even more difficult to collect. It was introduced into the Gambia and Nigeria in 1940, and into Sierra Leone in 1944. The rates payable are very low and the proceeds of the tax come predominantly from companies. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the rectification of this unfair incidence of taxation should be one of the first concerns of West African politicians, many of whom are wealthy men and in a position to give a lead.

---

<sup>1</sup> These are not the same each year. The *Return of Schemes* for 1948-49 (H.M.S.O.) showed the following totals for that year: Gambia, £83,881; Gold Coast, £81,775; Nigeria, £1,363,921; Sierra Leone, £278,180; General grants for West Africa, £231,642. Up to March 31, 1948, the territories had received: Gambia, £750,154; Gold Coast, £954,579; Nigeria, £11,507,014 (£113,250 of which was loan); Sierra Leone, £1,139,743 (£268,500 of which was loan); General, £561,905.

## (b) The Development Plans

In accordance with the provisions of the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940 and 1945, under which a Fund of £120m. was made available for all the Colonies for the ten years 1946-56, Ten-Year Development Plans were drawn up. The Gold Coast Plan has not yet been passed by the Colonial Office, but grants from the Fund are being made. The basic idea was that each territory should raise, by loan and revenue, twice the amount contributed by the Fund. Light was thrown on the whole problem of these plans by the special investigation carried out in Nigeria by the United Kingdom's Select Committee on Estimates.<sup>1</sup>

The principal weakness is that it is almost impossible to produce a plan at all, in financial terms, in the absence of reliable elementary statistics. The Nigerian Government's Department of Statistics appeared in the Estimates for the first time in 1947-48, while Sierra Leone and the Gambia have no such departments at all. Planning, moreover, is conditioned by the availability and prices of essential imported equipment, and here the original financial estimates have been falsified, from causes outside the control of colonial Governments. Nor did the United Kingdom Government appreciate the logical consequence of its own Act. The Committee reported<sup>2</sup> '... in the genesis of these schemes, no regard was paid either to priorities among the Colonies themselves for the supply of materials scarce in the United Kingdom, or even to priorities among the several competing interests within the same Colony. Still less were the United Kingdom's own requirements of scarce capital equipment taken into account... the evidence of the Chief Planning Officer, Economic Affairs, leaves no doubt that there is in London nothing even resembling adequate administrative provision for mutual long-term planning.' Of the Nigerian Plan itself, which at that time contemplated an expenditure of £23m. from the C.D. & W. Fund, £15m. from revenue and £17m. from loans, the Committee commented<sup>3</sup>: 'The Plan does not propound a complete strategy of development; it is merely an aggregate of proposals for spending the money... This is not planning.'

From experience in the Colonies and elsewhere, we can now see that the approach was wrong. The conception required is that of the Marshall Plan, in which the receiving countries get together in their planning, in which there is a reasonable target to aim at, and in which the final 'missing component' is supplied from

---

<sup>1</sup> *Fifth Report of the Select Committee on Estimates 1947-48. Colonial Development.* H.M.S.O. 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *Op cit.* page xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Op cit.* page xviii.

outside. The 'missing component' was not, as had been thought, finance, but it proved to be materials and skilled men. In the first few years, West African Governments were not even spending all their own revenues, not to mention C.D. and W. grants, and their *Annual Reports* sustain a constant wail on lack of equipment and technicians. In 1948, Sierra Leone, with its grants in its pocket, had to close two hospitals for lack of staff, and for four months had only one Senior Medical Officer in the territory.<sup>1</sup> The shortage emphasised the need for Africanisation of the services, and the local governments began to tackle this problem on a much larger scale than ever before. C.D. and W. grants are being freely used for the new University Colleges in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, for Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, for technical schools and colleges, and for sending students to England. The most encouraging evidence is to be found here. This year (1949-50), the following numbers<sup>2</sup> of students are in England:—

Territory	Scholarship Holders	Private Students	Total
Gambia ... ..	11	13	24
Gold Coast ... ..	295	212	507
Nigeria ... ..	221	717	938
Sierra Leone ... ..	38	153	191
<b>Total ...</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>1,095</b>	<b>1,660</b>

These numbers, of course, are quite inadequate in relation to the need, but a final solution to the problem of Africanisation will come only when the whole structure of educational services has been vastly expanded.

Despite these shortcomings, the Plans have been of great value. Now that the shortage of materials is easing, results are beginning to be seen. Numerous small, useful projects have been carried out, of which the following are examples: the Gambia has used C.D. and W. funds for drainage in Bathurst, for nutritional and geological research, and for hospitals; Sierra Leone for mechanical cultivation in swamp reclaimed for rice production, for a training centre in bricklaying, carpentry, etc., and for geological and leprosy surveys; Nigeria for schools, provision for urban housing, water supplies, development of the peasant textile industry, and for the Bamenda-Cross River-Calabar Scheme for settling on unused land families from the overcrowded areas of

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report, 1948*, page 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Colonial Students in the U.K. and Southern Ireland, 1949-50*. Colonial Office.

the Eastern Provinces; the Gold Coast, for geological surveys, anti-erosion measures and wells. Each one looks small on paper, but represents improved standards for some hundreds or even thousands of people.

Yet none of these is essentially different from the normal expansion of the work of Government departments. Any action to increase productivity or to improve social services is 'development,' and such action is going on all the time. The Gold Coast co-operates with Sierra Leone in fisheries investigations, has a training workshop for furniture-making, and conducts agricultural and veterinary research; the Nigerian Agricultural Department maintains experimental farms and has initiated mixed farming in the Northern Provinces; the Gold Coast and Nigeria are tackling their forests, the Gambia and Sierra Leone their swamps. To assist producers, the Gold Coast and Nigeria have built up strong Co-operative Departments, but the Gambia had no such Department until 1948. All four Governments have Labour Departments, of which the one in Sierra Leone has had the most outstanding success. In recent years, all four Governments have exhorted and assisted their people to grow more food.

Judged by what is desirable, the effects are negligible, for the problem is so vast. The Estimates Committee commented for Nigeria<sup>1</sup> that 'if the Ten-Year Plan were carried out overnight, the improvement in the condition of the mass of Nigerians would be barely perceptible. Between 22 and 25 million people are administered by some 2,000 Government officers in all departments. . . Even if these staffs could be immediately doubled or trebled, the impact of government services on the life of Nigeria would be slight. . . There is one doctor for every 133,000 people and one hospital bed for every 3,700, compared with one doctor for every 1,200 people and one hospital bed for every 250 people in the United Kingdom. There are ten dentists. Over 20m. people are living on an agricultural subsistence of a very low order, and malnutrition and disease are widespread.' The Gold Coast reported in 1947<sup>2</sup> 0.49 hospital beds per thousand people in the Colony, 0.34 per thousand in Ashanti, and 0.17 per thousand in the Northern Territories and British Togoland. The Gambia estimated<sup>3</sup> in 1948 that it had 5,000 to 6,000 lepers and 10,000 sufferers from sleeping sickness, and in 50 villages surveyed 'all were heavily infected with malaria.' There were two hospitals, with 174 beds between them, and a population estimated at 229,284.

The Estimates Committee concluded that the whole people must be mobilised, and that this required much closer association

---

<sup>1</sup> Op cit. page xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Report*, 1947, page 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report*, 1948, page 20.

of the local people with actual development work. At the bottom level, there has for long been an amazing amount of activity amongst the people. Funds have been collected to build schools, students have been sent to England and America, and the missions have frequently received a ready response when they have asked for assistance in their social work. There is also the tribal tradition of voluntary labour for village services, though it is said that in some areas this is declining. In some cases, local initiative has resulted in substantial economic improvements.<sup>1</sup> If the administration could add technical assistance to popular momentum, it was thought, the energies of even the poorest people could be effectively mobilised.

One example of such a combination was ready to hand. The Committee was impressed by the Udi community development scheme, in which the people themselves made roads, improved their water supplies, built co-operative stores and used their earnings to build maternity centres, embarked on a literacy campaign, and so on. They were led by an outstanding District Officer, and the appropriate technical officers gave their help, but the initiative came from them.

The Udi scheme<sup>2</sup> has become the model for Eastern Nigeria. The Government has offered to contribute sums equal to 50 per cent. of the value of voluntary labour given under such schemes, and is training senior administrative officers to play their part in them. They hope to increase and to canalise into economic development the immense enthusiasm that the people of the Eastern Provinces have shown in recent years, and have expressed largely through their tribal unions. The same spirit is visible elsewhere in Nigeria (though hardly, yet, in the North) in Sierra Leone, where Dr. Laubach's literacy methods have been used with success; and in the Gold Coast, where it was decided last year to set up local development committees to supplement the work of native authorities, and the Legislative Council voted £100,000 for their use. If, when the constitutional discussions are over, the political leaders will turn their attention (as some of them have already done) to this process of economic nation-building, community development, as now understood, should go far to supplement Government action.

### (c) Government Economic Action

It cannot replace Government action. West African economic problems cannot all be solved at village level. Though financial

---

<sup>1</sup> A detailed account of the Communal Farms in the Kantora District of the Gambia is given by Dr. Kenneth Little in the *Journal of African Administration*, Vol. I, No. 2, April, 1949, page 76. Other examples could be given for the Gold Coast.

<sup>2</sup> Fully described in Appendix 5 to the *Report*, page xlvii.

investment is useless without materials and men, it is essential. This part of the task can be done only by Governments. Foreign private enterprise cannot, as explained above, undertake easily large productive enterprise in West Africa. Even public investment from outside may be suspect if large areas of land are required for it. With the exception of the Colonial Development Corporation's Poultry Farm in the Gambia, for which 10,000 acres of previously unproductive bush have been cleared, large-scale agricultural projects like the Overseas Food Corporation's Tanganyika Groundnuts Scheme are unlikely to be attempted in West Africa. The mechanised production of groundnuts was, in fact, declared to be 'not immediately feasible' by the West African Oilseeds Mission,<sup>1</sup> on the grounds that the farmers would not yet agree to reorganise their existing holdings. A much more fruitful line of approach is suggested by the Niger Agricultural project at Mokwa, where over 3,000 out of a projected 30,000 acres have already been cleared and ten settler villages are being constructed. The clearance and ploughing is being done by machines, but it is not intended that production will be highly mechanised. The aim is to establish an area for cultivation of both cash and food crops, and to establish village communities with their own native administration and expert help available, not a single employing body as in Tanganyika. The Mokwa scheme is a joint enterprise of the Nigerian Government and the Colonial Development Corporation. The Corporation is also preparing for shark-fishing all along the coast, to provide dried fish for inland markets, and has started a rice project in the Gambia.

Other projects are being financed and run by public corporations set up by the West African Governments themselves.

The Cameroons Development Corporation was formed in 1947 to develop in the interests of the inhabitants the plantations formerly owned by German settlers. The Corporation has re-established the banana export trade, and is expected to replant considerable areas with higher-yielding oil palm and rubber, and possibly to establish cocoa plantations. The Gold Coast Industrial Development Corporation was started in 1948, to establish new industries and to assist African enterprise. In its first year, the Corporation established three companies, for soap, handicrafts and lumber, and gave assistance to local firms engaged in laundry work, wood-working, printing, pottery, etc. The Corporation has had the co-operation of Barclays Overseas Development Corporation in making loans for industrial projects. The Gold Coast Government has also established an Agricultural Development Corporation, which has initiated a pilot scheme at Damongo on which great hopes have been fixed for the development of the Northern

---

<sup>1</sup> *Report of West African Oilseeds Mission, 1948. Colonial No. 224, page 5.*

Territories. Crop rotations are to be worked out, and soil, water and topographical surveys have been completed. If the pilot scheme succeeds, it is hoped to settle Africans to farm co-operatively, producing yams, groundnuts, guinea-corn and possibly tobacco. Another major project which will probably be publicly financed is the Volta hydro-electricity scheme, for which surveys have been completed. If successful, the project will also embrace irrigation and drainage, and there will be aluminium development based on local bauxite deposits, which are said to be the largest known in the world.

Nigeria has not set up local corporations, but has concentrated instead on Regional Production Boards, established in 1949, which include African members. The Northern Regional Production Development Board has started on the mechanised cultivation of rice in Sokoto, and intends to use this first venture as a pilot scheme for mechanisation in the Northern Region. The Eastern Regional Board is buying Pioneer Oil Mills for the palm oil areas.<sup>1</sup> These Boards, which were created by ordinance and have a fairly free hand, appear to be following on the Department of Commerce and Industries, which has established mills to be passed over to local private enterprise. The Nigerian Department has also encouraged local crafts, particularly textiles and raffia. Sierra Leone established a similar Department in 1948, and has also initiated Pioneer Oil Mills for its palm oil.

Yet the most important economic achievement in West Africa to date is not concerned with production, but with the stabilisation of the price of the main crops. The export crops were dealt with first, succeeding to the machinery established during the war. The Gambia Oilseeds Marketing Board was established in 1948, taking over from the West African Oil and Oilseeds Board in the United Kingdom the responsibility for buying and marketing the entire export crop of groundnuts, and of fixing prices to the farmer to avoid violent fluctuations. Sierra Leone established a marketing scheme for cocoa as well as oil and oil-seeds, and also for coffee, which it sold to the British Ministry of Food. The Nigerian and Gold Coast Cocoa Marketing Boards took over in 1947, both with African representation. In 1949, Nigeria set up Boards for groundnuts, palm oil and cotton.

The work of these Boards cannot be over-estimated. They sell abroad at world prices, and, when these are high, set aside in stabilisation funds about 70 per cent. of the difference between the world price and their price to the grower. Roughly the remaining 30 per cent. of the difference goes to research and for such

---

<sup>1</sup> This Board consists of four Unofficial Members of the House of Assembly and three Government officers. Since its inception, it has granted 39 loans to individuals, groups and public bodies, for undertakings of benefit to the public. The other regional Boards follow the same pattern.

development as the provision of storage and market facilities. When the world price falls, the price to the grower is sustained from the stabilisation fund. The system prevents the disastrous fluctuations which were a feature of West African life before the war, and also ensures that the industries concerned tackle their internal problems. The Nigerian Cocoa Board, for example, claims that by offering premiums to the growers for better grades of cocoa, it has achieved a marked improvement in quality. The Gold Coast Cocoa Board has financed the cutting-out campaign against swollen shoot disease.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Boards make contributions to the general development of their territories. Grants from the Gold Coast surpluses have been made to the University College, while in Nigeria grants have been made to the Regional Production Boards, to the Ibadan University College, and for roads and bridges.

In the light of the experience of the last few years, when droughts and concentration on cash crops have reduced food supplies and the cost of living has rocketed throughout West Africa, steps have also been taken to deal with products consumed internally. The Gold Coast Government has undertaken bulk purchase of foodstuffs, to facilitate transport to areas of shortage and to provide for storage of surpluses. By providing farmers with guaranteed prices and a market for their produce, it is hoped to encourage them to produce more food. It has also set up an Agricultural Loans Board to assist private growers of food crops and to relieve indebtedness. A similar system is being tried out in Sierra Leone.

#### (d) Need to Revive Planning Conception

Thus the West African Governments are tackling the economic problems of their territories at all levels and by a variety of methods ranging from small community schemes to the big projects of the Colonial Development Corporation. At the same time, all kinds of industrial and trading concerns are being started by African and foreign enterprise, ranging from the U.A.C.'s great plywood factory at Sapele, Nigeria, to the small-scale African mining operations in the Gold Coast. Yet there is constant criticism of sins of omission and commission, which can only be modified (it will never be stopped, and should not be stopped). The conception of the Ten-Year Development Plans has largely been pushed into the background. The Plans aroused initial enthusiasm, which should be revived. The Sierra Leone Government is making an attempt at this. The new Chief Commissioner for the Protectorate, Mr. H. Childs, has drawn up a *Plan of Economic Development for Sierra Leone* which covers more than the Colony's Ten-Year Plan, and

<sup>1</sup> In the House of Commons on April 19, 1950, it was stated that 20 per cent. of the estimated total acreage under cocoa in the Gold Coast and 8 per cent. in Nigeria was affected by the disease.

examines the country's production as a whole. It aims at doubling agricultural output, with a concentration on palm-oil and rice, and considerable developments in communications and minerals. By fitting into one picture the work to be done by Government and the practical possibilities for work at a popular level, he revives the conception of the 'great move forward' which was the principal merit of the Ten-Year Plans. The Plan was approved by the Legislative Council in December, 1949, and District Councils, with the help of Central Government grants, are to assist in carrying it out.

There will be no 'great move forward' unless West Africans themselves make it. At present one gets the impression of great life bubbling underneath and sensible and devoted official work from above, with little or no connection between the two. The Nigerian Government's efforts at connecting them are outstanding, but the problem has by no means been solved. Nigeria has a host of Boards with Africans on them at every level, but Boards are remote institutions at the best of times, and the Africans who serve have little time to give to them and may or may not have a political 'pull.' The United Nations Trusteeship Committee's Visiting Mission commented, for example, on the Cameroons Development Corporation, that '... the people feel excluded from both knowledge of the Corporation's affairs and participation in them in any way: there was even an impression that the Corporation was undistinguishable from any of the previous or existing private plantation companies.' This is a familiar criticism of public corporations as British Socialists know by experience. It is no doubt unavoidable in existing circumstances in West Africa, but it should not extend from the larger bodies to the smaller schemes, which, at present, it does.

The real trouble is the root-trouble of all West African life—it is dominated by officials. No people has ever been inspired by officials, except on the smallest scale where there is scope for outstanding individual personalities. The need is for *political* management, with which the people can feel themselves identified—or, at least, connected. Thus the constitutional and local government changes now taking place become of supreme importance in the economic and social development of West Africa. In each Colony, a 'plan of campaign' needs to be publicised, and politicians should accept responsibility for it when they have power. The British Government can also make its contribution—funds made available under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts have been allocated, and new provision must now be made.<sup>1</sup> There must also be much better co-ordination with British requirements of men and materials. Much has been done since the Select Committee

<sup>1</sup> In *West Africa*, May 13, 1950, Mr. David Rees-Williams argues that this step should be taken this year.

on Estimates reported, particularly in the allocation of steel, but much more remains to be done.<sup>2</sup> Two 'missing components' must, in fact, be found for West Africa—the technical skill and capital for investment which must still come from outside, and the mass effort from below which West Africans have demonstrated that they can make, but which still needs to be co-ordinated and directed into the most profitable channels.

## 2. Political Development

### (a) The Social Basis

With such deep changes taking place in West African life, political ferment is only to be expected. It has occurred principally in the two groups most affected by change—the educated classes and the small but growing working class. Both of these groups have burst the bonds of tribal institutions, of the native administration system established under indirect rule, and of the constitutional system which gave weight to officials, to chiefs and Government nominees, and to commercial and mining interests, rather than to the mobile groups who have in important respects entered into an individualist culture. These are the frustrated groups, who make the political running. Except for the Mohammedans, the literates are Christian by education; they have often moved away from home to areas where they are strangers and are consequently debarred from a full share in local political life; even at home their path is blocked by the older men who dominate native local institutions; in the national field, many are Government servants and therefore excluded from politics; while only the wealthiest and the foreign-educated have much hope of rivalling the Europeans on their own ground. The workers are in an even worse position. They endure the worst of the housing conditions in the towns, they are poorly paid if their insecurity is taken into consideration, and they have no social status. Even skilled and intelligent manual workers are regarded as inferior to clerks, and are beginning to develop the feeling of unjust denial of opportunity which in Britain led to the growth of the Labour movement.

It is not easy to accommodate either of these two groups, for they are not completely divorced from their roots. Much as they tend towards the individualist conception of European mass democracy they have not completely arrived. They retain strong attachments to their families and their places of origin, and often their resentment at the European assumption of superiority strengthens their ties with the native institutions which have

---

<sup>2</sup> There is an incisive article on this point by Nigel Fish in *West Africa*, June 10, 1950, page 511.

provided them with so little scope. There are many examples of this political living in two worlds, such as the conflict of thought amongst Gold Coast politicians on the position of chiefs and the extraordinary spectacle in Western Nigeria of chiefs being toppled over by their subjects one after another while sophisticated and radical political leaders accept honours and titles bestowed by chiefs.

Not only tribal feeling, but tribal organisation, is maintained, and carried upward on to a national level. The 'youngmen's' organisations in the Gold Coast and the tribal unions in Nigeria have prevented the complete detribalisation of men who may never, now, move back home, and have strengthened the reluctance of the 'receiving' areas to admit strangers fully to local life. It means that British institutions undergo a sea-change in the hands of even the most Europeanised West Africans. The recent constitutional discussions provide many examples, such as the demand that candidates for election should stand only in their own localities, the suggested inclusion of Lagos in the Western Region of Nigeria for the purposes of Legislative Council elections, the refusal of the Southern representatives in Nigeria's central constitutional conference to allow the Northern claim to representation on a population basis, the refusal of the North to have Southerners resident in the North represented at their local constitutional conferences, and the stand of the Colony politicians in Sierra Leone against representation for the Protectorate on a population basis. In all of these examples, other factors besides tribal feelings are involved, but each example shows an unwillingness to accept a purely geographical basis for political representation.

The same feature is seen in the political parties, particularly in Nigeria. At the bottom level, there is in the South a developing consciousness of the tribe as a whole, which finds its political outlet in the demand for ethnic states and its organisational expression in the tribal unions. It has a double action—on the one hand it arouses political consciousness amongst the sections of the population that have not been detribalised<sup>1</sup>; on the other, it colours national politics, not only because Nigerian politics are dominated to a great extent by personalities, but also because sectional interests have been allowed to determine national programmes.

The most outstanding example is in the Western Provinces. There the Egbe Omo Oduduwa was established in 1948, supported

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1949, the first conference of the 'Ibo State' was held at Aba. It was reported to have been attended by 2,000 people, who included not only national politicians (President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe) and local leaders (Secretary, Mr. Jaja Wachuku) but also district representatives sent from politically undeveloped villages. The assembly discussed Nigerian as well as Ibo problems.

by Yoruba rulers and politicians, to improve educational facilities, and to develop political institutions aiming at the emergence of a Yoruba state within a federal state of Nigeria. Though there have been differences of opinion, it would appear that the ideas of this movement, local in essence, have emerged on to a national plane through the Nigerian Youth Movement. The National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons, which draws its strength largely from the Eastern Provinces, on the other hand, adopted a programme based on British and American ideas and machinery, which was national in content, though it paid less attention to local conditions.<sup>1</sup> After a bitter quarrel in 1947 and 1948, these two parties came together in the National Emergency Committee formed after the Enugu shooting in November, 1949, and are now attempting to build up a united party. A similar clash between the ideas of individualist mass democracy and the attempt to combine detribalised elements with traditional rulers appears to be at the root of the political, as distinct from the personal and organisational, factors in the separation of Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party from the United Gold Coast Convention.

The fact is that West African politicians have great difficulty in deciding to which groups in the population to appeal, and their fluctuations are due not to the inherent instability which is so often attributed to them, but to the fundamental difficulty of their position. The same strains and stresses are to be observed in the trade unions, which have in both the Gold Coast and Nigeria been disastrously split by political and personal differences,<sup>2</sup> and in the press, which publicises disagreements in the bitterest possible language, and thus feeds the flames.

## (b) The Post-War Disturbances

Political consciousness in West Africa therefore generally spreads with an acid flavour of frustration. Since there are very genuine grievances, an outlet is found in sustained anti-Government agitation, in strikes, and in occasional incidents which quicken the whole tempo. It is of no small importance that there have been three shootings in West Africa since the war, at Burutu in Nigeria

---

<sup>1</sup> The differences in approach can be seen in the constitutional proposals of the two parties, set out in the Nigerian Youth Movement's *Proposals for 1950 Constitutional Reforms*, January, 1949, and the N.C.N.C.'s *Freedom Charter*, adopted at Kaduna in April, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Unity may come in this field also in Nigeria. On May 26, 1950, the Nigerian Labour Congress was established at a conference of the Trade Union Congress, the National Federation of Labour and the Federation of Government Non-Clerical Workers.

in June, 1947, when two were wounded; at Enugu, Nigeria, in November, 1949, when 18 were killed; and in the Gold Coast in February, 1948, when there were 29 killed and 237 injured in five towns.

The Gold Coast Disturbances<sup>1</sup> drew together, so to speak, all the different strands in the pattern of West African discontent. They followed a long period of shortage of consumer goods, and high prices for those foods, which culminated in the burning and looting of European stores; there was a disorderly demonstration of unemployed and discontented ex-servicemen in Accra, which was fired on by police; there was discontent amongst cocoa-farmers at the compulsory cutting-out of diseased trees; and at the height of the disorders the Working Committee of the United Gold Coast Convention, a party formed in August, 1947, under the leadership of Mr. George Grant and Dr. Danquah, of which Mr. Kwame Nkrumah became Secretary in December, 1947, telegraphed the Secretary of State to inform him that civil government had broken down and that they were 'prepared and ready to take over interim government.' The telegram went on:—

'We ask in name of oppressed, inarticulate, misruled and misgoverned people and their Chiefs that Special Commissioner be sent out immediately to hand over Government to interim Government of Chiefs and people and to witness immediate calling of Constituent Assembly. . . We speak in name of inherent residual sovereignty in Chiefs and people in free partnership with British Commonwealth for our country to be saved from inept incapable Government indifferent to sufferings of the governed. . . Let King and Parliament act without delay in this direst hour of Gold Coast people and their Chiefs. God Save the King and Floreat United Gold Coast.'

The Committee of Enquiry which followed recommended the most thorough constitutional reform, at both local and national levels.

The Enugu shooting provides a similar landmark for Nigeria. Though it began as an industrial dispute in the Government colliery, it became an event of political importance. Riots followed the shooting in Aba, Port Harcourt, Onitsha and Calabar, though not in Enugu, and such precautions as the rounding up of European women and children for their protection gave an unmistakable indication of the official attitude of mind. The original dispute showed also the extremely unsatisfactory state of the colliery workers' trade union, which was led by a miniature Bustamante, and of the organisation of the colliery. It revealed the difficulty of working a modern system of industrial relations machinery through unsatisfactory representatives of the workers and officials

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast, 1948*. H.M. Stationery Office. Colonial No. 231.

with no experience in England of the political implications of the development of a labour movement. The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into this shooting made detailed recommendations on these points.<sup>1</sup>

The full political results remain to be seen. Already the two major political parties in the South, and the principal trade union federations, have drawn together. On the other hand, the fact that the trade union came so badly out of the Enquiry may cause a hostile reaction towards trade unions in the more conservative quarters. A major blow has, however, been dealt to official prestige also.

### (c) The Stages of Constitutional Advance

The principal targets of the political critics are the territorial constitutions. Each territory has an Executive Council, dominated by officials, but with a minority of nominated Africans, and a Legislative Council with power to advise and discuss, but not to control Government policy. The next stage for Nigeria and the Gold Coast is a measure of African ministerial responsibility. This has also been proposed by the Government of Sierra Leone, but not yet enacted.

The Legislative Councils were established first for the Colony areas, and only subsequently included representatives for the Protectorates. The Protectorate was not represented in the Gambia until 1947, but in Sierra Leone it has been represented since 1924. In the Gold Coast, Ashanti was not represented until 1946, and the Northern Territories are still unrepresented in the Legislative Council. In Nigeria, the Northern Provinces gained representation for the first time in 1947. Thus even the machinery for territorial unity has not yet been completely established.

If the orthodox stages are to be followed in the advance to self-government, the West African territories still have some way to go. So far, Ceylon is the only self-governing Dominion of the British Commonwealth which has advanced to independence through all these stages despite the initial absence of any indigenous tradition of representative Parliamentary government. The following table shows the dates at which Ceylon reached each stage, and the parallel advances so far made in West Africa :—

---

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disorders in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria, November, 1949.* Colonial No. 256. H.M. Stationery Office, 1950.

	Ceylon	Nigeria	G.C.	S.L.	Gambia
Establishment of Legislative Council ... ..	1833	1922	1874	1863	1843
Beginning of elected representation on Legislative Council ... ..	1910	1923	1925	1924	1947
Unofficial majority on Legislative Council ... ..	1920	1947	1946	—	1947
Elected majority <sup>1</sup> on Legislative Council ... ..	1923	—	—	—	—
Universal franchise ... ..	1931	—	—	—	—
Unofficial representation on Executive Council... ..	1922	1942	1942	1943	1947
Ministerial system ... ..	1931	—	—	—	—
Executive responsible to Legislature on internal affairs ... ..	1931	—	—	—	—
External and Internal responsibility (Dominion status or Independence) ... ..	1948	—	—	—	—

<sup>1</sup> There is a form of indirect election coupled with nomination for 13 members in the Gold Coast and five are directly elected from the four municipalities. In Nigeria, there are four directly-elected members (three for Lagos, one for Calabar) and 18 unofficials appointed by a combination of nomination and indirect election. These cannot be termed elected majorities, but it would be inaccurate to regard them as purely nominated. The Gambia and Sierra Leone have no members indirectly elected. All four Legislative Councils include some nominated unofficials: Gambia, 6; Sierra Leone, 7; Gold Coast, 6; Nigeria, 6. Gambia has one directly-elected member, and Sierra Leone has three.

### (d) The Gambia and Sierra Leone

At the end of the war, each of the four Governments embarked on constitutional changes. The Gambia Legislative Council in 1947 gained an unofficial majority of seven to six, and three unofficial members of the Legislative Council, including the elected Member for Bathurst, entered the Executive Council. A conference of Protectorate Chiefs, first called in 1944, is called annually to discuss problems common to the whole Protectorate, and it is envisaged that this may be the forerunner of a Protectorate Council. The Gambia was the only territory in which the changes did not provoke a fierce political campaign of opposition.

In Sierra Leone, the policy of regionalism, which was followed in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, was initiated in 1945. In that year, District Councils were established throughout the Protectorate, and a Protectorate Assembly, chosen from these Councils, was set up. It was thought that, although the Colony was directly represented in the Legislative Council, the Protectorate representatives would

be chosen indirectly, that is, by the Protectorate Assembly. The distinction is important. If the whole territory were divided up into constituencies on a rough population basis, and each constituency returned its member, members from the Protectorate would greatly outnumber those returned from the Colony. If, on the other hand, Sierra were to be permanently divided into *two* regions, one Colony and one Protectorate, there might be a basis for granting equal representation to the two regions, though this, in view of the great preponderance of population in the Protectorate, would be grossly unfair on a population basis. The Colony people, who are 'Creoles' descended from the original settlers, have a much longer political experience than those in the Protectorate, and are educationally more advanced. They are unwilling to be swamped by the mass of Protectorate illiterates, and, indeed, leading articles on the subject in some Sierra Leone newspapers read exactly like the outbursts of white settlers opposing elective representation for Africans in Kenya. The controversy has prevented Sierra Leone from making any major advance since the war.

The first proposals were put forward by Sir Hubert Stevenson in 1947. He suggested that nine Protectorate representatives on the Legislative Council should be chosen by the Protectorate Assembly, and that there should be an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council. In the Executive Council, African members were to be placed in charge of some departments. These proposals were discussed in the District Councils and in the Protectorate Assembly. From these emerged the suggestion that the Protectorate representatives should be chosen through the District Councils, who should choose one each. This would have meant 13 in all—a number which the Colony politicians were not prepared to accept, since only seven had been proposed for the Colony. After consideration by a Select Committee of the Legislative Council, proposals on this basis were made in 1948 by the new Governor, Sir George Beresford Stooke, and were actually approved by the Secretary of State. These proposals made no stipulation that Legislative Council members should be literate in English—a condition which would have weighed heavily against the Protectorate.<sup>1</sup>

But in December, 1948, as a result of protests in the Colony, the Governor had to agree to a further review of the proposals. In December, 1949, he announced his intention of setting up a Committee to report on the composition of a Legislative Council with an unofficial majority. In April this year he reported to the

---

<sup>1</sup>The discussion in the Select Committee on this subject showed that the Protectorate Chiefs in that Committee were mostly in favour of literacy, but felt hampered by the previous decision of the Protectorate Assembly that this condition should not be insisted upon. See *Sessional Paper No. 8 of 1948*, Government Printer, Freetown. This incident throws light on the problem of the mandate where Legislative Councillors are chosen by a regional assembly, as is now being proposed for Nigeria.

Legislative Council that he had been able to get no agreement even on the composition of the Committee. He announced that if no agreement were forthcoming, he would be compelled to revert to the proposals of 1948, adding<sup>1</sup> :—

' . . . we must move on. In the first place, this country has already reached the stage where the people must take a larger measure of control over and responsibility for the management of public affairs. Secondly, we are already embarking upon large and far-reaching plans for the economic development of the country. It is a time when we can least afford to dissipate our energies in political dissensions, and when we should rather be concentrating all our vigour upon raising the standards of living of the people, and bringing true social justice within the reach of all in the land. In England, there is a proverb which runs, "You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink." I can convoke you to an assembly but I cannot make you agree. I can now do no more than leave this question to your good sense of judgment.'

This series of events in Sierra Leone has been recounted in some detail, because it throws light on the difficulties facing constitution-makers in West Africa. Sierra Leone has been quiet since the war, and political feeling has never been as bitterly expressed as in Nigeria and the Gold Coast; there are no well-developed political parties locked within the confines of their own programmes; the chiefs constitute no insuperable difficulty, and the Government did not have to be pushed into constitutional reform by agitation from below. Yet no new constitution has yet been introduced.

### (e) The Gold Coast and Nigeria

In the Gold Coast and in Nigeria, it has been a very different story. Here new constitutions were introduced in 1946 and 1947. In Nigeria, no attempt at popular consultation was made. In the Gold Coast, there were discussions, but they did not reach the real thoughts of the political movements. Both constitutions were expected to last for some ten years. The Richards Constitution in Nigeria was vehemently opposed from the start. The Burns Constitution in the Gold Coast was accepted quietly at first, but the incidents of February, 1948, were used as the occasion for demands for its replacement, as shown above.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Statement to Legislative Council, April 18, 1950. *Weekly Bulletin*, April 18, 1950, Public Relations Officer, Sierra Leone.

<sup>2</sup> See page 30.

It is not possible here to give full details of these two constitutions, or of the proposals now being discussed to replace them.<sup>1</sup> A proper treatment of the subject would require a pamphlet to itself. Some features can, however, be examined.

Both Constitutions granted an unofficial majority, but the method of selection of members was not democratic. In the Gold Coast, five members were elected from the municipalities (two from Accra, one each from Kumasi, Cape Coast and Sekondi-Takoradi); four from the Ashanti Confederacy Council; and nine by the Joint Provincial Council of the Colony. The two last-named Councils consider all bills that are to be introduced into the Legislative Council. They consist predominantly of Chiefs, but in 1946 the Joint Provincial Council chose non-chiefs for two of its seats in the Legislative Council, and the Ashanti Confederacy chose three.<sup>2</sup>

In Nigeria the division of the country was taken much farther. Three Regional Councils were set up in the Northern, Eastern and Western Provinces, each with power to discuss legislation before its submission to the Legislative Council, and with a regional budget for which provision was made in such a way as to preclude ultimate devolution to three distinct regions, federated at the centre. These Regional Councils acted as electoral colleges for the Legislative Council, and therefore their composition was of territorial importance. The Northern Provinces had a House of Chiefs, and a House of Assembly in which the unofficials were chosen by Native Authorities. The Western House of Assembly included three Chiefs, seven members (other than major Chiefs) selected by Native Authorities, and five nominated by the Governor. The Eastern House of Assembly had nine provincial members selected by Native Authorities and five Government nominees. In each House of Assembly, there was an unofficial majority of one, but it was widely alleged that selection by Native Authorities meant actual domination by Chiefs and officials, and certainly this was true of the Northern Provinces at least. Lagos and Calabar

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Gold Coast: Report by the Committee on Constitutional Reform* 1949, Colonial No. 248. H.M. Stationery Office. *Gold Coast: Statement by H.M. Government on the Report of the Committee on Constitutional Reform*, Colonial No. 250. H.M. Stationery Office. *Proposals for the Revision of the Constitution of Nigeria, March, 1945*, Cmd. 6599. H.M. Stationery Office. *Speech by the Chief Secretary to the Government in the Legislative Council, March 11, 1949*, Government Printer, Lagos. *Constitutional Review, Digest of Regional Conference Proposals, 1949*, Government Printer, Lagos. *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Nigeria on the Constitutional Review, April, 1950*, Government Printer, Lagos.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gold Coast 1919-1946*. F. M. Bourret. Oxford University Press. Page 197.

retained the only constituencies from which Legislative Councillors were directly elected, by residents with an income qualification of £50 a year.

As to the balance of representation in the legislatures, the weight in the Gold Coast was given to the Colony. In Nigeria, the Northern Provinces sent nine members, the Western Provinces six, the East five, the Colony one, and Lagos and Calabar four. Since the North has roughly half the population, this seems unfair. On the other hand, in the Moslem parts of the North the British view of democracy is not readily accepted, and the domination of the Emirs is due to the social structure, not merely to educational backwardness, and is therefore less likely to change than the conditions in the Protectorate of Sierra Leone which caused fear in the Colony.

Neither in the Gold Coast nor Nigeria were the new legislatures able to control the Executive Councils. There were no African Ministers, and the Governor's powers remained untouched. The new Constitutions, therefore, did little to bridge the gap between the governments and the people, though they did provide some political experience for a greater number of Africans than had previously been the case.

The Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Gold Coast Disturbances made a change inevitable in the Gold Coast. It was decided to move on in Nigeria also. The question of the method of change then arose. The United Gold Coast Convention had already demanded a Constituent Assembly, while the opinion was freely expressed in Nigeria that the worst feature of the 1947 constitution was Sir Arthur Richards' failure to consult the opinion of the people. In both territories consultation was, therefore, decided upon.

In the Gold Coast, an all-African Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Coussey. The Joint Provincial Council and the Ashanti Confederacy Council each chose four Chiefs to sit on it. The Northern Territories Territorial Council, participating for the first time in the affairs of the whole Gold Coast, chose two Chiefs and two non-Chiefs. Twenty-seven others were nominated by the Governor to represent all shades of political opinion except the extreme wing led by Kwame Nkrumah. This Committee was really a Committee of All-the-Talents, and it produced a most able and far-reaching Report. It suggested an Executive Council including eight African Ministers chosen from the legislature; an enlarged and almost wholly-elected legislature; Regional Councils; and reformed local government.

The Committee was almost equally divided on a bicameral or unicameral legislature. By a majority of one, it decided in favour

of two Houses, hoping thereby to provide in the Upper House for equal representation of the four Regions (The Colony, Ashanti, the Northern Territories, and Trans-Volta), to 'maintain the sovereign authority of the various states' and to 'enable paramount chiefs and other persons of eminence who would not be disposed to stand for ordinary election, to make a valuable contribution to the government of the country in a place befitting their rank, dignity and position.' The arguments against a second chamber were equally solicitous of the Chiefs, suggesting that 'the inter-action of thought between elected members and "Elders" in a unicameral Chamber would not only be beneficial but would be in consonance with the accepted traditions of the country,' and that 'once a second Chamber is established it would be extremely difficult to disestablish it should it later be found unnecessary.' The status of the chiefs might be destroyed in the process.' The first of these two arguments weighed heavily with the Secretary of State, who expressed his own view in favour of a single chamber. This does not, however, provide for equal representation of the Regions, which was not recommended for a single Chamber. For the Lower House, the Coussey Committee recommended 29 from the Colony, 19 from Ashanti, 19 from the Northern Territories, 8 from Trans-volta-Southern Togoland Region. The Ashanti members did not support this allocation, but the rest considered it a fair compromise between representation on a population basis and representation by region.

For the franchise the Committee proposed the retention of direct election in the urban areas. Elsewhere, it was proposed to have a primary electoral college which would then choose a member. Men and women would vote, but must previously have registered and paid their share of rates or taxes.

It would be difficult to improve on the Coussey proposals. H.M. Government has not been prepared to agree to the responsibility of ministers to the legislature, which, indeed, is always difficult to envisage in the absence of a party system, but most of the proposals have been accepted and are now in the hands of the Legislative Council. Dr. Nkrumah, who is at present in gaol for inciting an illegal strike, opposed the Report and demanded Dominion status, though he appeared to think this was compatible with the retention of an official Defence Minister. Dr. Danquah continues the campaign for a second chamber and responsibility of Ministers, and for the proposals to be considered by a Constituent Assembly.

The Nigerian consultations were of a very different kind. There it was decided to work from the bottom upwards. District Councils discussed the wishes of the people and sent representatives to Provincial Councils, which in turn sent representatives to

join with members of the Regional Houses of Assembly in Regional Conferences. The Regional Conferences each produced a set of recommendations and elected members of a General Conference and of a Drafting Committee. This Committee took the Regional proposals and beat them into one draft, which then went to the General Conference. The General Conference's proposals finally went to the Legislative Council.

This procedure had the merit of providing political education for everyone who played any part in it, of providing a channel for the expression of popular opinion, and of securing in advance the support of local politicians for proposals which they have shared in making. Against these advantages there are other considerations. In the absence of concrete proposals to consider, there were floundering at the lower levels, as would occur in any gatherings that met without an agenda or programme for discussion. The issues involved were of great magnitude, but they had to be discussed by politically inexperienced people in a minimum of time. They could not be expected to produce very original ideas on their own, and if they did so, the originality was eliminated at regional level. It would be interesting to know what those at the bottom made of the procedure—whether they expected their representatives to act as delegates and stick to whatever mandate they had, or whether they understood that the final product might be very different from what they had expected. Those who asked for the Freedom Charter must certainly be left with a sense of disappointment—if they are not, it can only be presumed that they do not understand either the Freedom Charter or the final proposals or possibly both. Even the Regional representatives must be thinking hard. In the long run it is all to the good, for it shows that compromises must be accepted if any advance is to be made. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that participation will necessarily bring consent to the final proposals. If these are not liked, the composition of the conferences, or some other factor, will be blamed.

The final proposals include ministerial appointments at the centre and in the Regions; selection of members of the central legislature, including those for Lagos and Calabar, by the Regional Houses; and greatly increased regional autonomy. The North asked for half the seats in the central legislature, and proposed to restrict candidatures for its own legislature to Northerners. The Southern representatives would not agree to the claim to parity, and finally it was decided to consider the possibility of an Upper House at the centre, in which parity might be allowed, provided that the North withdrew its decision to allow only Northerners to stand. The final decision on the important question of regional representation has, therefore, in Nigeria as well as Sierra Leone, still to be made.

It is evident that the principal weakness in the Nigerian discussions was the absence of any political party solidly based in all parts of the country and with a carefully-thought-out constructive programme for constitutional advance. In face of the enormous geographical and human difficulties, it has not, in fact, yet proved possible to build up a political counterpart to the unity at present imposed by the administrative machine. If this cannot be done within the next few years, it is questionable whether it will be possible to hope for a self-governing Constitution for the whole country, since the proposals now put forward go so far towards the 'Pakistanisation' which was, in some quarters, so much feared in the first place.

A second weakness, which is brought out by comparison with the Coussey Report, is the indeterminate basis of the proposed constitution. It does not decide to build on the growing individualistic, mobile elements,<sup>1</sup> nor does it suggest a systematic attempt to get the best of both the old world and the new, which in the Coussey Report is found in the detailed proposals for local government.

### **(f) Local Government**

The Coussey Committee began at the root by stating its proposals for local government first. These are for local councils in which the elected members would be dominant, but a place would be found for the traditional authorities. It was also suggested that the new bodies should have authority over all the population in their districts, not over persons of African descent only. It has, in other words, been seen that native institutions must be adapted to conform to the needs of a less stable population.

Similar changes are in process of being made elsewhere in West Africa, but elsewhere the initiative has come from the administration. The District Councils in Sierra Leone, for example, consist of two representatives from each chiefdom, one of whom is the paramount chief. The other is chosen by the tribal authority, but is not necessarily a member of that authority. It is hoped that by this means young educated men may be given their chance to speak for their people. A major change is now being launched in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria, where democratically-elected councils, with very wide powers on the English model, are to be established.<sup>2</sup> Here, the proposals were initiated by officials, but discussed and explained personally to the

---

<sup>1</sup>The Eastern Regional Conference did actually decide in favour of direct individual voting for all adults who registered, but this did not penetrate to the final proposals.

<sup>2</sup>Local Councils will have to submit their financial estimates for approval by the Regional Authority. It is to be hoped that such approval will normally be given without amendment or delay.

people by touring members of the Eastern House of Assembly. The Western Regional Conference on Constitutional Reform also expressed a wish for reformed local government, but made no concrete proposals on the place envisaged for the Obas. In the Moslem areas of the north, the problem has not yet been tackled. Local authorities of an autocratic kind are strongly established, and slow transition rather than radical reform is the aim of the administration.

Thus fundamental changes in the structure of government are being undertaken at all levels throughout West Africa. The channels are being opened for political activity. Are they the right channels? And will the masses of the people now respond?



## IV THE INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE

There have been grave misgivings in many quarters at the pace of this 'forward march.' It is argued that Africans are being plunged into unfamiliar political institutions that they will not be able to work; that self-government will in practice mean the domination of the masses by self-seeking politicians; and that the economic foundations for self-government should be laid before political responsibility is granted. All of these arguments have force and indicate the risks that are being taken. But what are the risks on the other side? Even if political discontent is confined to a minority, can we be happy that both the Nigerian and Gold Coast Governments since the war have had on occasion to resort to emergency powers and the suppression of some political associations? Is it not inevitable that the politically conscious must lead the rest, and should their abilities, therefore, not be welcomed and used? Lastly, how can economic advance be achieved without a great surge of effort on the part of the people, and how can this surge be stimulated except by Governments in touch with the people?

It is the nature of official government to be divorced from the people—it cannot give a political lead in any real sense. The time has come in West Africa when this lead must be given by the politicians, and it is up to the people to build up the organisations which will give them the politicians they want. If progress towards self-government is the criterion, the most marked difference between the Indian situation before the transfer of power and the West African situation now is to be seen in the character and strength of the national movements. It is true that the West

African movements are not yet national, but the foundations have been laid, and it is worth while to give some consideration to the problems confronting the men who are trying to build on those foundations. These men live permanently in a dangerous world in which they have one foot (socially speaking) in Government House and the other perilously close to the pit of sedition, and they do their work in conditions which would dumbfound the average British party agent. If their difficulties were realised, they would be given more credit than they usually receive for their very considerable achievements.

Their first difficulty is one of policy. Are they to travel on the road beaten out by Ceylon, or by the Indian road of organising non-co-operation on such a scale that the Government is undermined? The Ceylonese model is beloved of Governments, but it carries none of India's inspiration to African nationalists. This inspiration is real in West Africa. Indian stores frequently have a portrait of Gandhi hung up, and many Africans well below the clerk level know who it is and why the portrait is there; a prisoner in the recent Gold Coast trials was reported to have appeared in court wearing a Gandhi cap; when brought into court, the young Nigerian secretary of the Zikist movement, now suppressed, refused to plead; a new Nigerian newspaper carries instalments of Pandit Nehru's *Autobiography*, and another recently printed Tagore's moving verse, 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high . . .'<sup>1</sup> Non-co-operation clearly has an attraction which more sedate methods of agitation can never enjoy.

Its supreme merit is that it goes the short way to what must be every nationalist's first goal: it conquers the people's ideological dependence on their rulers. True independence cannot come, Mahatma Gandhi used to teach, 'until every peasant has straightened his back'. Only a man with his head held high can embark upon sustained non-co-operation. It is the proof that his psychological dependence has gone. He is a free man, respected even by the judge who sends him to gaol. The chief strength of non-co-operation is, however, its greatest weakness. Most Africans are at the moment very far from being free men in this sense, and it is difficult to strike the chord which will bring the right response. India had her memories and a leader with a religious appeal, but an appeal to religion would be disastrous in Africa, if only because it would divide any potential movement at its roots. Yet non-co-operation must be on a mass scale to be effective: it is the policy of a strong movement, not a weak one. If it is weak,

---

<sup>1</sup> And it is surely not mere coincidence that the *West African Pilot* recently referred to the backward Birom as 'Children of God'—that is, by the English version of the name (Harijan) which Mohatma Gandhi gave to the Indian 'Untouchables.'

no notice will be taken of it—as was said tactlessly and brutally, but none the less truly, in the early stages of Indian civil disobedience, 'The dogs may bark, but the caravan passes on'. And while it is passing, the non-co-operator has to wait, working patiently and systematically until he is joined by sufficient allies to bring the caravan to a halt. This requires a discipline and a faith which are not easy to achieve.

Co-operation is almost equally difficult. In this case, the nationalist leader has to build up confidence in the alien rulers and a spirit of freedom at one and the same time. He has difficulty in feeling confidence himself, for he is more aware of the apathy of the British electorate, on whom British policy ultimately depends, than he is of the permanent factors which compel a measure of continuity in that policy, whichever party is in power. And the policy is carried out on the spot by officials who may or may not believe in it in their hearts.

The fact that they are officials is of double importance. All Europeans in Africa, particularly officials, move about with the whole prestige of British power behind them. This in itself prevents them from appreciating the position of the African politician, for they have never experienced anything like his position and never will. Moreover, most officials have never been politicians, except in an official capacity. They have never embarked on the job of building up a movement from underneath, they have never even been heckled on general election platforms at home. They ask the politician to make compromises which may lose him his entire following, and think he is 'unconstructive' or 'negative' if he refuses to take the risk. If they really 'feel' the difficulties of the politician's position, it can only be from an imaginative grasp above the normal, and most officials, like most politicians, are not above the normal.

These are the people on whom the nationalist politicians must place their trust, and on top of this they are foreigners. Between them and the Africans there are none of the intangible, emotional links which we call 'solidarity', the almost instinctive bonds which sustain a man when he makes mistakes or is compelled to follow a policy his supporters may not understand. These links exist for the official, but they bind him to his service and to Britain, not to the African politicians with whom he is trying to work. And they exist for the politician, but they bind him to his party, his tribal union, his family, his country. He must ask himself all the time whether Governmental concessions are genuine, and his reply is conditioned as much by these underlying factors as by the objective nature of the proposals he is asked to consider. It is for this reason that a policy of keeping one jump ahead of the extremists will not necessarily bring rewards, for co-operation

depends on mutual trust which, in the last resort, depends on personal qualities to an alarming extent.

Personal factors, on both sides, matter much more in Africa than they have done for many years in Britain. This is so in all immature movements, and must be so amongst an illiterate and politically backward population. In such movements, very heavy burdens are carried by the leaders. They may be successful in making an emotional appeal, and their capacity to do this is in itself a major contribution, but an intellectual appeal is more difficult, and nationalists must be able to achieve an intellectual response if their movements are to be strong enough to take power. They are asking their people for a long-drawn-out sustained effort, and they must ask them through an educated class which by its very position must feel frustrated and disinclined to wait. Yet there are no easy victories and no quick results. When the new West African Ministers ultimately take their seats in Executive Councils, they will face economic and political problems of a most fundamental nature in countries starting at a level so low that even major advances will seem minute in space and depth. Only a very highly disciplined movement can face the disappointments, the waiting, the petty corruptions and internecine warfare which are part and parcel of political life. Till such organisations have been built up, nationalist leaders will be unable to draw the sustenance from the rank and file which all politicians need to feed them. Deprived of this, they may throw up the sponge in despair, take to extremism if only to keep a lead, or take the bold course of making their own decisions, in which case they may neglect the basic work of constructive education. Anyone who has worked in the highly-organised British Labour movement must be aware of the importance of solidarity and discipline independent of personalities, and must see the weakness of the African movements in these respects.

It is against this shifting background that the African politician works, and against this that he must be judged. Many British politicians and many British officials would fail in such conditions as these. The politicians are often accused of seeing only the constitutional issues to the exclusion of the ordinary man's real needs. This criticism is unjustified. Independence is a constitutional state, not a mere idea; in British conceptions, it means constitutional machinery of a specific kind. African politicians expect to have the whole apparatus, and some are facing with courage (as the Coussey Report showed) the difficult task of reconciling this apparatus with the state of mind of the people. Some of them, no doubt, are unaware of the magnitude of this task, but others are aware that constitutions require people to work them. One Nigerian leader commented to the writer that we in

Britain did not need to write out our constitution in detail because, he said, 'Your Constitution is in your hearts and in your blood'. He knew that that is where a constitution must be if it is to succeed.

It is, therefore, in the hands of the African leaders and the British officials that the future of West Africa lies. The officials, like the politicians, are in a peculiarly difficult position. The pace of Africanisation is determined by educational facilities, and cannot be hurried beyond a certain point. Yet Africanisation is a most urgent need. Meanwhile, there are constant and bitter attacks on the pay and allowances of European officials, whose standard of living, which is not always high judged by British standards, is a constant provocation in the face of African conditions. The provocation is increased by the fact that other Europeans—the missionaries—are, apparently, much happier on much lower standards. But the blunt fact is that officials are essential, and that salaries are already too low to attract them in sufficiently large numbers. It might be useful if the whole question of expatriation pay could be looked into again. Should it be pensionable? Should it be paid to officials, such as single men and women, who do not have two homes to maintain? Should not the British Government reconsider the statement of the *Select Committee on Estimates*<sup>1</sup> that 'there would seem to be a strong case for the suggestion made in evidence that expatriation pay should be made a charge upon the British Exchequer', and might not this prove to be one of the most useful forms which British financial assistance to West African development might take?

It should be recognised that the task of officials in the period immediately preceding the transfer of power is infinitely more difficult than it is in the early stages of administration. It is more important than ever before that officials on the spot should be of the highest possible quality. Britain should be prepared to pay for this. The task of national leaders is also becoming more difficult. Self-government is no longer far off. It is not enough now to ask for it without detailing the precise methods of government which are required. West Africans, for their part, must throw up the leaders who can meet this need.

Whatever the decisions of the pilots, the main course is now set. West Africa will go forward. It is to be hoped that it will go forward at a pace which will not be too fast or too slow for its people, and that it may go forward in peace and constructive co-operation. If that hope should be fulfilled, it will be for the first time in the history of the world—but may not West Africa be the first?

---

<sup>1</sup> Op cit, page xvi.

*This pamphlet is copyright. No part of it may be reproduced without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to Fabian Colonial Bureau, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1*

# **The Fabian Colonial** **Bureau**

Annual Subscription	...	...	£1
Students	...	...	10s.

The Annual Subscription entitles members to receive free of charge the monthly journal **Venture** as well as all pamphlets published by the Bureau, notices of meetings and annual reports.

**Venture** is a monthly journal on colonial affairs, written from the Socialist angle.

Subscription to *Venture* only ... 7s. a year

---

Details of membership and other publications may be obtained from

**The Secretary**  
**Fabian Colonial Bureau**  
**11 Dartmouth Street**  
**London, S.W.1**