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## Eight Years of Transition in Ghana

By SIR CHARLES ARDEN-CLARKE

*Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, G.C.M.G., formerly Governor-General of Ghana, gave the address which follows at a joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Royal Empire Society on November 21, 1957. Miss Margery Perham, C.B.E., presided.*

I WILL TRY to tell you something of what has happened in Ghana. I see that the Speaker of the House of Commons is reported having said recently that brevity is the one attribute of a good speech that is within the ability and power of all of us. That is the one attribute that I feel is within my compass, but it has been denied me today as I have been asked to speak for about 40 minutes. I must crave your indulgence, therefore, for any deficiencies in what I say.

In speaking this afternoon of the eight years during which I presided over the transition of the Gold Coast from a dependent Colony-cum-Protectorate into an independent member of the Commonwealth under the name of Ghana, I propose to concentrate on the political and constitutional aspects of the problems that presented themselves, not because the economic and social problems were or are insignificant but because those were the problems that were most difficult, which engaged the greater part of one's time and attention and attracted the most publicity.

Ghana is a comparatively small country with a population of only some 4½ million, nearly all Africans, and without any significant non-African racial or immigrant problem, for the few thousand non-Africans in Ghana are practically all temporary sojourners who return to their own homelands when their period of work there is over.

Ghana is not regarded as a vital strategic base. Like most of the rest of Africa, it is under-developed and requires a large infusion of capital and skills from overseas if the living conditions of the people are to be improved within the next few decades. As elsewhere in Africa, its economy is mainly agricultural and needs to be diversified, but it is fortunate in that its main export crop—cocoa—on which the country's prosperity depends has during the last few years been most lucrative and enabled it to finance a large-scale development programme out of its own resources. It is in the political sphere that Ghana's chief importance lies as the spearhead of politically emergent Black Africa.

During my eight years in Ghana, it was a matter of some astonishment to me how often I was asked two questions. The first was: **Is not the grant of independence to an African territory a new concept of British Colonial policy?** The second and more difficult to answer was: **Are you not going too fast along the road to independence?** I should like to deal with those two questions this afternoon.

As regards the first, it is useful to remember that it was in 1864, nearly 100 years ago, that a Select Committee of the House of Commons dealing with West African affairs resolved :

“The object of our policy should be to encourage in the natives the exercise of those qualities which may make it possible for us more and more to transfer to them the administration of all the governments.”

To come to more recent times and strike a more personal note, when I went to Northern Nigeria in 1920 as an Administrative Cadet, having been inspired to go there by seeing the name of Lord Lugard on my old school notice board, it is true that I had never heard of the Select Committee's resolution which I have just quoted, but I and my fellow Cadets were told in more colloquial language that our job was to teach the people to stand on their own feet and manage their own affairs. That is what a host of administrative officers, educationists and others, both in and out of the Colonial Service, have been trying to do since World War I and even before then.

Few, if any, of us ever dreamed forty or thirty, or even twenty, years ago that within our own working life-time we would see the translation of an African Colonial Territory into a free and independent State standing on its own feet in the comity of nations and managing its own affairs. I think that most of us realised, however, that that was our ultimate objective. In the light of all that has transpired since World War I, we can see now much more clearly what was then very nebulous to us, that we were, and still are, engaged in the task of transforming an old-style dependent Empire into a modern Commonwealth, into a voluntary association, to their own mutual benefit, of free and independent States imbued with similar ideals of freedom, justice, the rule of law and democratic government.

To inculcate those ideals upon the people committed to their charge and to teach the people how to make them work in practice has been the task imposed upon the Colonial Service by British Colonial policy during my 37 years in the Service, and to the man in the field the political complexion of the Government that happened to be in power in the United Kingdom has made little or no difference.

The grant of independence to dependent territories capable of standing on their own feet economically and maintaining reasonable standards of administration seems to me to be the natural and inevitable outcome of British Colonial policy during the past century, although I agree with you, Madam Chairman, that it was not very practically or lucidly planned.

The second question which I have so often been asked—were we not travelling the road to independence too fast—can best be answered if I briefly describe what happened in Ghana during the eight years of my Governorship. Early in 1948 there had been serious riots—not serious by Indian standards but serious by Gold Coast standards—in the principal towns of the Gold Coast, and the country was in turmoil. After order had been restored, a Commission—the Watson Commission—was appointed by the United Kingdom Government to inquire into the causes of the dis-

turbances and to make recommendations. It duly did so and included in its recommendations some far-reaching reforms in the constitutional sphere, giving the African a much bigger say in the management of his own affairs—a much bigger say than more cautious-minded people thought desirable or practicable.

The Commission, like a good many other Commissions, was of course accused of having exceeded its terms of reference. Be that as it may, something had to be done about its recommendations, and an all-African Committee, widely but not fully representative of the people of the Gold Coast, was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice (now Sir Henley) Coussey to consider and advise on the question of constitutional reform. I say that the Committee was not fully representative because its membership did not take account of a split in the ranks of the Nationalist Party, the United Gold Coast Convention, after the 1948 riots.

Kwame Nkrumah, summoned from his studies in the United Kingdom to become general secretary of the U.G.C.C., decided to establish his own more militant Nationalist Party, to be known as the Convention People's Party—the C.P.P. The party was launched in June, 1949, with its slogan of "Full Self-Government Now," "Now" being printed in capital letters and usually repeated three times, in place of the U.G.C.C.'s slogan of "Full self-government within the shortest possible time." The C.P.P. attracted a very large following. Launched some six months after the appointment of the Coussey Committee, it was not represented on that Committee.

It was two months after the launching of the C.P.P. that I was appointed Governor. I gathered in London that the country was regarded as being on the edge of revolution and that I was expected to go and do something about it. The situation was certainly tricky and difficult when I arrived in Accra in August, 1949. The Coussey Committee had not yet finalised its Report (it was presented some two months later and published) but it was known that it would not recommend the immediate grant of full self-government; while the C.P.P. had made it abundantly clear that it was not prepared to accept anything less than "Full Self-Government Now," that any constitution embodying less than that would be regarded as "bogus and fraudulent"—to use their own words—and that it would resort to what it called "positive action" to achieve its ends.

Stripped of the high-sounding verbiage with which it was surrounded, "positive action" appeared to mean recourse to the calling of illegal strikes for political ends, the subversion of lawful authority and the creation of chaos to compel the British Government to hand over power. Much lip service was paid to the principle of non-violence, but given the conditions that then obtained and the volatile temper of the people, it was perfectly clear that violence would most certainly ensue.

After my arrival, I lost no time in going round the country. Except in the larger towns, where the C.P.P. was most active and most strongly represented, I did not find much support for unconstitutional action. On the contrary, there seemed to be a general feeling opposing it. But there was

undoubtedly a strong feeling in favour of independence and freedom from alien domination, except possibly in the Protectorate of the Northern Territories, comprising about one-quarter of the people of the country, where the people were more backward educationally and less politically minded, were mistrustful of their neighbours the Ashantis and the people of the Coast and seemed on the whole to prefer that British protection should continue for a while longer. Even in the North, however, there were few leaders and spokesmen who were prepared openly to resist the demand for independence, although they wanted its attainment deferred.

The Report of the Coussey Committee was duly published and generally acclaimed, except in extreme nationalist and anti-imperialist circles, as a reasonable and progressive document. It advocated far-reaching advances towards self-government, including a general election and an Executive Council with an overwhelming unofficial African majority, but not full self-government. The C.P.P. would have none of it and party propaganda to prepare the people for "positive action" was intensified.

The party leaders had been officially informed and were well aware that they had a perfectly constitutional way of achieving power and gaining their objectives, if their candidates at the forthcoming election were returned. I have good reason to believe that some at least of the party leaders would have preferred not to resort to "positive action" but to await the results of the general election, of the outcome of which they were fairly confident. But they found themselves enmeshed in the coils of their own propaganda. The tail wagged the dog, and "positive action" was duly declared in January, 1950.

The Government had had plenty of time to prepare for it and my response was to declare a state of emergency. A general strike was called but did not receive the support of the workers to the extent expected by the C.P.P. There was some rioting. Prompt and firm action was taken to restore the situation and to maintain law and order. Within three weeks, the country was almost back to normal and those chiefly responsible for the trouble were in prison.

There is one feature of this emergency which I should like to emphasise: we managed to avoid making any political martyrs. Although two policemen were killed in a riot—and this speaks well of the discipline of the police—there were no fatal casualties among the rioters—plenty of "bloody coxcombs," but no bodies. The police had the strictest injunctions to use batons, not bullets, and they obeyed despite the gravest provocation.

No extraordinary powers such as banishment or special courts were used to deal with the leaders. They had been warned beforehand that if they broke the law, the law would take its course. They were tried in the usual way in the ordinary criminal courts and had the normal rights of appeal, of which some availed themselves. This did much to lessen any sense of grievance or unfair treatment which might have embittered the personal relationships on which the course of subsequent events depended so much. It was, indeed, unnerving at times to observe as we worked our way from one Constitution to

the next, how much depended upon the personal relationships between a few leading personalities—between the Governor and the elected leaders of his Government, between one or two senior officials and the African Ministers.

After “positive action,” there was a breathing space. The C.P.P. was in eclipse, its leaders in prison and there was a political vacuum. Other political leaders proved unable to fill that vacuum. As the leaders of the C.P.P. completed their short sentences and came out of prison, they set about resuscitating their party organisation, with marked success. By the end of the year the party, with its slogan of “Self-Government Now,” was stronger than ever.

Meanwhile, a Constitution based on the Cousey recommendations was hammered out and extensive changes in the administrative structure made in preparation for it. The old Central Secretariat was abolished and in its place some ten or more Ministries were established, each with a civil servant styled a permanent secretary at its head to be ready for the new Ministers. It was a cumbersome structure, which in the matter of staff was obviously going to provide some notably good examples of the working of “Parkinson's Law”; it creaked but it worked.

The Constitution based on the Cousey proposals was duly promulgated and early in 1951, in accordance with its provisions, a general election was held, the first in the history of the country. The result of that election was a sweeping victory for the Convention People's Party. The party's leader, Kwame Nkrumah, was, however, still in prison; the rest of the leaders had served their sentences and were out. I decided to release Nkrumah. There were pros and cons aplenty to be considered before adopting such a course, and plenty of pressures were being applied. It was, however, obvious that the C.P.P. would refuse to co-operate in working the Constitution without their leader.

Nkrumah and his party had the mass of the people behind them and there was no other party with appreciable public support to which one could turn. Without Nkrumah, the Constitution would be stillborn and if nothing came of all the hopes, aspirations and concrete proposals for a greater measure of self-government, there would no longer be any faith in the good intentions of the British Government and the Gold Coast would be plunged into disorders, violence and bloodshed. After all, one cannot govern effectively without the consent—or, at least, the acquiescence—of the majority of the governed, except by force. Force was out of the question and it was clear that that acquiescence would not be forthcoming. So Nkrumah was released.

Nkrumah and I had not then met. We knew each other only by reputation and my reputation was, I think, as obnoxious to him as his was to me. I sent for him. He arrived with some of his colleagues and I invited him to form a Government. That meeting was redolent of mutual suspicion and mistrust. We were like two dogs meeting for the first time, sniffing around each other with hackles half raised, trying to decide whether to bite or to wag our tails.

Soon afterwards, Nkrumah came to see me alone and we were able to get to know each other. This time the hackles were down, and before the end the tails were wagging. Although much was left unsaid, we both understood that there were two men who could break the Constitution and the



whole experiment in five minutes—Nkrumah and I—and that that would advantage no one. We believed that we had the same objective, the attainment of full self-government for the country, and though we might differ as to the how and the when—and we did differ—we both felt, I think, that it would be in the best interests of the country and of ourselves if we worked with and not against each other. That was the beginning of a close, friendly and, if I may say so, not unfruitful partnership.

I have dwelt at some length on those early days because they set the pattern of what followed, and I have left myself very little time for the rest. I do not propose to inflict on you the details of the various constitutional changes that were made. Broadly speaking, the Constitution of 1951—the Coussey Constitution—established at the Centre an Executive Council of eleven Ministers, eight of whom were selected from among the elected members of the Legislative Assembly and three of whom were officials. The Chief Minister, an African elected Minister, was styled the Leader of Government Business. The Governor was required to preside at all meetings of the Executive Council and was vested with comprehensive reserve powers to veto or enforce legislation as he deemed fit, subject of course, to certain safeguards. Defence and external affairs were reserved to the Governor in his discretion.

The Constitution provided for another general election within four years and it was taken for granted in the Gold Coast that that election would coincide with further constitutional changes giving a larger measure of self-government, if not the full thing. We were under no illusions that we could mark time for very long on the Coussey Constitution. We had set out to drive along a deeply corrugated road and, as all who have driven their cars along such roads, which are common in Africa, know, there is only one safe pace and that is dictated by the weight and power of the car and the depth of the corrugations. If one goes too fast, one is liable to bounce into the ditch; too slow, and the car shakes itself to pieces. We had to find the right pace for our Gold Coast car. Some thought that 60 miles an hour or more was the right pace, others would have preferred to travel at 20 miles an hour. In the event, we compromised at 40. The car stayed on the road and arrived intact at its journey's end.

As might be expected, the first few meetings of the new Executive Council, a strangely assorted group of individuals, were as redolent of mutual suspicion and mistrust as my first meeting with Nkrumah and his colleagues. The officials were suspicious of the politicians and the African Ministers mistrusted the "European agents of Imperialism," as they were said to regard them. But the members of the Council were all reasonable men, and this soon passed as we got to know each other better. There were wide differences of opinion as to the best pace and the best means of achieving full self-government, but no differences that full self-government within the Commonwealth was our objective and that it should be achieved, if at all possible, with good will on both sides.

Our meetings gradually became more like family affairs, members arguing

and quarrelling happily and sometimes violently with each other in private but showing a united front to the outside world. Within three months, the principle of collective responsibility had been accepted and was firmly established, and the Executive Council, later to be known as the Cabinet, were working as a team towards a common objective.

That Coussey Constitution lasted three and a half years. During that time, we lived in an atmosphere of perpetual crisis. In fact, so accustomed did we become to that atmosphere that I had occasion to remonstrate with one of my most senior officials for trying to invent a crisis. We had had none for a fortnight, and he felt like a fish out of water ! He pleaded in extenuation that like the housemaid's baby, his crisis was only a little one.

We learnt a good many lessons during that period. We learnt, for example, how effective the device of changing names could be. It is, I suppose, true that " a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," but we learnt that if we changed the name of Leader of Government Business to Prime Minister and Executive Council to Cabinet, without in any way altering their functions and powers, or the name of Chief Commissioner to Regional Officer, or District Commissioner to Government Agent, they all seemed to smell much sweeter in the public nose. That device certainly helped to get us over some difficult periods.

I have no time to go through the list of the lessons we learnt ; we were learning them every day. There are, however, two points that I should like to make. We suffered the consequences of our failure to Africanise the Civil Service and to train Africans to occupy the senior posts in the Civil Service long before. It is anathema, and understandably so, to a Nationalist Party on coming into power for the Ministers to find themselves surrounded by a phalanx of senior civil servants, all of whom come from overseas and none from their own country : this tends to make nonsense of their claim that they are obtaining independence.

We suffered also the consequences of not having foreseen in time and not starting sufficiently early to reorganise our local government system. If you are to have a parliamentary democratic Government at the centre, it is unwise to wait too long before trying to make your local government system more democratic by establishing local elected councils and not depending so entirely on the traditional authorities. It is, however, easy to be wise after the event, and none of us, I think, ever dreamed that we would have so little time in which to prepare these countries for the independence they were seeking.

In 1955 came the next Constitution, giving the largest possible measure of self-government short of complete independence to the country. The Assembly consisted of members all elected under a system of universal adult franchise : there were no nominated or otherwise selected members in the Assembly. The Cabinet consisted entirely of African Ministers presided over by an African Prime Minister : the Governor no longer attended Cabinet Meetings. But the Governor's reserve powers were still in being, powers that I had no occasion to use during my eight years in Ghana. Defence and



external affairs were still reserved subjects that lay within the discretion of the Governor, but during those last two years before independence, my powers in relation to these two subjects were exercised in full consultation with the Ministers and our task in the Governor's office was to establish the embryos of the future Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs.

My time is up and I must stop. In March this year Ghana achieved its independence. To revert to the question of whether we went too fast, the "Now, now, now" of the C.P.P. lasted for some seven years before self-government was achieved, and achieved with good will on both sides. I do not know whether it would have been possible to slow things down and still retain that good will; and if that good will had been lost, I wonder whether Ghana would still be a member of the Commonwealth? That is as far as I will go in answering my own question.

## Discussion

A MEMBER of the audience, who recalled the lecturer's remarks that but for inviting Kwame Nkrumah to become Chief Minister the Constitution would have become unworkable, with very serious consequences, said that a rather similar situation was arising in Kenya. Although Africans were refusing to work the Constitution, the Kenya Government had had the courage of its convictions to say that Government could go on perfectly well without them, because the African elected members were not, in fact, representing the African people. As far as Nkrumah's party was concerned, the number of Ghanaians participating in the last general election in Ghana was only one-sixth of the population, and it seemed an appalling betrayal of responsibility to the remaining five-sixths that for the sake of friendly relations with a small clique, the country should have been handed over in the way that it was.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE, in reply, contented himself with saying that the conditions in Ghana and those in Kenya were entirely different.

A MEMBER, who had stayed in Kumasi in 1954, said that she had experienced a great sense of resentment and hatred towards the British and hoped that it had now died down.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE replied that the member must have been unfortunate in her contacts. There was certainly some fairly bad inter-racial feeling in the early stages immediately after the 1948 riots and until the emergency cleared the air, but subsequently one was surprised and enormously pleased at the lack of racial feeling that existed among the people. Their aim was not so much to get the European out as to stop him being the alien dominating power. Subject to this, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke thought that if Europeans were prepared to stay and help, they would be welcomed.

A MEMBER asked whether it would be safe to assume that the tendency to take dictatorial power was but a laudable effort to maintain the integrity and unity of the country and to prevent it from going, as it was feared Nigeria might go, into different sections.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE replied that that would be a quite good assumption to make, but whether it was entirely safe he was not prepared to say. He did not, however, think that there was any desire for a real dictatorship in Ghana, or that there was anyone there who would, or could, make an effective dictator.

A MEMBER pointed out that one of the great problems apparently facing the present Government was the fact that there was only one party on a truly national basis. This presumably arose during the colonial period from the fact that there was only one party basing itself on the one negative aim of excluding British power. Was there any way in which, during that period, more than one nationally-based party could have been

encouraged to grow up, and was there any way of applying lessons to other parts of Africa to encourage a multi-party system before the handing-over of power ?

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE, in reply, recalled that an American journalist who once asked Nkrumah when he thought an effective Opposition would emerge was given the answer "Until independence, there is only one political platform—that is, independence—and I happen to be occupying it." It was probably not peculiar to Ghana that there was a monolithic nationalist party and that an Opposition was slow to emerge. An effective Opposition was, however, now emerging, and possibly more effectively than in India, which had had many years of independence.

A MEMBER asked whether there was much contact between the people in the South, and those in the North and whether any attempt was made to get the two to mix by, for example, encouraging people in the South to spend their holidays in the North.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE replied that he did not know of any deliberate Government action to encourage the people to mix, and it was difficult to see what the Government could do ; but the general development of communications, education and trade and commerce in the country was acting as an excellent mixing machine.

A MEMBER asked whether the lecturer could add one detail to his very human and dramatic story by saying whether he sought authority in London before inviting Nkrumah to come to Government House.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE replied that he could not remember.

A MEMBER asked whether the Volta scheme was making progress.

Sir Charles ARDEN-CLARKE replied that it was not. It was still a scheme which required a very large amount of money. The search for the money was continuing, but it did not seem to have been very successful so far.

Miss Margery PERHAM, in closing the discussion, said that as a student of colonial history she felt that the lecturer had made a real and important contribution to a chapter of history which was half colonial and the other half of which related to the achievement of independence. What he had said had sounded disarmingly simple, but nobody would be deceived into thinking that it was quite as simple as that. The fact that under almost intolerable strains and complications he had so managed to retain the good will of people whom he had ruled and who had claimed their independence that they had asked for their Governor to remain was a fairly good comment on the way that he had handled the situation.

Although it might sound easy, it should not be forgotten what tremendous strains these situations threw not only upon the Governor, but upon his staff. These strains were now being taken in other countries and would be taken elsewhere. Those who represented Britain in these places and who were taking the strain required from those at home, not sympathy, but a very intelligent understanding of what was happening. An address such as that to which members had listened today would help to bring about that understanding for the men who represented the nation in the present very difficult times.