

GHANA: THE MORNING AFTER

ANTHONY SAMPSON

Former Editor of 'Drum'
Now on the Staff of the London 'Observer'

ONE must face up to the fact, it is impossible to be objective about Ghana. The little country, tucked unobtrusively underneath the paunch of Africa, has become so much of a symbol of right or wrong, such a complete guinea-pig in the eyes of the world, that she cannot be recognized and judged for what she is—just another independent country, with the problems of any other sovereign state. The world sits watching, deeply prejudiced on one side or the other.

No one, of course, is more embarrassed by this publicity than the Ghana government itself. It was pleasant enough at the Independence celebrations, when Mr. Nixon and the Duchess and even the man from *Die Burger* came along and seemed so anxious to help. But, even then, it seemed a little too good to be true. The world was just waiting, say the Ghanaians, for the first little slip to happen, and back they all came to Ghana, this time hurling abuse, and criticizing her for the tiniest things, like a bad-tempered schoolmaster with a favourite schoolboy who makes a spelling mistake.

A good deal of the Ghanaians' complaint about unfair treatment from the world certainly has some foundation. In their anxiety over the young country, many people seem to have lost all sense of perspective, or comparison with other states. For the kind of things that have caught the world's attention in the last few months—a few deportations, a prohibited immigrant, a contempt of court case, and some angry speeches—would go unnoticed in most other countries in Africa; and the Ghanaians know it.

Indeed many people in Ghana claim, not without some justification, that they are still the freest country on the Continent. Taking a look round the local newspapers, with their wild rumour-mongering against the Government, their seditious editorials and defamatory news items, one is inclined to agree. In the everyday life of the country, where the judges are mostly known to sympathize with the Opposition, and the police deal severely with Government thugs (as even the Opposition grudgingly admits), there are very few signs of the kind of

leaning towards dictatorship that can be perceived in other parts of Africa.

But there is certainly something going wrong. Exactly how wrong, and what has made it so, it is very difficult at this early stage to assess. For Ghana is still obviously only at the stage of stretching her newly-independent limbs, and the young forces of power are still rushing to fill the vacuum left by the British. All one can do now is to try and analyse the pressures which are working behind the scenes and which have scattered these recent sparks of unease.

A great deal of Ghana's troubles were brooding, inevitably, before Independence. The country itself is divided by tribes and allegiances almost as deeply as South Africa, and the rivalry is bitter. The main Opposition party, the National Liberation Movement, which has its headquarters in Ashanti with a magnificent tribal background, has bitterly resented the arrival of the upstart politicians like Nkrumah from the Coast, who have little respect for tribal dignities and have tried to break down the old regional loyalties. Last year the NLM did its best to delay Independence and to obtain a constitution which gave it regional safeguards. Once promised the safeguards, it grudgingly agreed to Independence. But the quarrel was far from finished. Seeing the whole power of the country fall into the laps of their enemies, the Opposition leaders became not only bitter, but jittery.

The Ghana Opposition leaders are not very subtle. They consist partly of hereditary tribal chiefs who want to retain their authority; and partly of intellectuals and professional men, trained in a very British tradition, who look with scorn upon the demagogues of the Government. Between them, they have strong personal antipathies towards the Government front bench, and they leave no doubt about it. They talk very freely of civil war and secession, and do everything they can to denigrate and jeer at the Government.

Nkrumah, therefore, had quite enough troubles heaping his plate in keeping together a divided country, even before the coming of Independence. And Independence, much though it boosted Nkrumah's prestige for the moment, very soon brought new political complications. For, of course, the political masses expected that things would be much better for them as soon as the British had gone. There were all those speeches, spoken at rallies in the heat of the moment, about cars and houses and white men's jobs. And then, when all

the dances and singing were over, what difference was there, after all? The English Governor-General was still in his castle. The British United Africa Company still controlled most of the trade of the territory. Africans were still just as poor, and none of the houses that were talked about seemed to arrive. And the cocoa price drifted downwards.

Naturally, Nkrumah found that his following was much less easy than before. There was no longer a convenient common enemy to unite the country. He was attacked not only from the right, by people who said that he was a revolutionary upstart, but from the left, by people who said that he hadn't gone far enough, that all he had achieved was a kind of fake Independence, with the strings still pulled by Britain. At the same time, Nkrumah found that all the old complaints that used to be made against the bad imperialists, were now naturally being directed in turn at him.

No doubt it was partly for this reason—and also probably for other less sensible reasons—that Nkrumah thought it would be wise to move into the damp old castle outside Accra, and to have his head put onto the country's coins and stamps. The castle had for so long been regarded as the centre of power that it seemed important that the man inside it should be black, to remove all doubt as to who was in fact running the country. What Nkrumah seems not quite to have reckoned on, however, was the effect of the castle on himself. Picturesque though it looks, the horrible old place has driven more than one Governor mad before now. For Nkrumah, whose whole political career had depended on his flamboyant way with the crowds, his ordinariness and slumming around the place, the combination of the castle and the big crested Rolls in which he emerges from it has had a bleak and isolating effect. And they give ammunition to the Opposition in its favourite charge—that Nkrumah has become, like the pig Napoleon in Orwell's *Animal Farm* (a best seller in Ghana), as white as any white man.

While Nkrumah was finding it hard enough to keep his country together, the Opposition was determined to make it even harder. The climax came in June when the Prime Minister was in London, having such friendly talks with Mr. Macmillan. While Nkrumah was charming London with that care-free laugh of his, throwing back his head and crinkling his whole face with laughter, his opponents in Ghana were busy organizing a new and subversive tribal party in the heart of his own constituency

of Accra. Nkrumah came back to Ghana to hear booings in his own pet streets, and his own party in a state of general unease. It was that, together with a scathing newspaper article by a disillusioned ex-admirer of his, Bankole Timothy, called "What next, Kwame?", which seems to have set off the whole lady-cracker.

Nkrumah was determined, as he promptly announced, to show who was governing the country. He deported Timothy, followed by two Opposition leaders, and appointed his 'strong man', Krobo Edusei, as Minister of the Interior. He introduced new Bills to outlaw tribal parties, to enforce central control of the tribal districts, and to provide for hasty deportations.

A good deal of this firm rule was probably quite necessary. It was important to show who was governing the country, and the Opposition was asking for trouble by organizing itself in so thoroughly seditious and unparliamentary a way. But the new developments wore an ugly look. Krobo Edusei, a short tough little demagogue, half clown and half ruthless organizer, was very far from being a model minister; he summed up the more disreputable and rabble-rousing side of the Government Party, which Nkrumah had so far kept reasonably under control.

Obviously there is a danger that, in attempting his show of strength, Nkrumah will be tempted to forget the niceties of democracy; it is not an easy course for anyone to steer. What makes it much harder is the fact that all the countries of the world, and particularly in Africa, are looking over his shoulder. Will it be Liberia all over again? Or Haiti? Or South Africa?

The barrage of criticism, comment and advice that Ghana has received from the world outside has inevitably exacerbated the situation. Ghana, like most young countries, has an inferiority complex towards her elders, and is likely to reply to criticism with aggressive retorts rather than with thankful obedience. Britain still finds it difficult to remember that Ghana is not, in fact, dependent upon her; and the more the British newspapers condemn Nkrumah in pontifical tones, the more he is likely to reassert his independence by doing the very opposite. And the position is made more delicate by the fact that the Opposition is unwisely very much inclined, like the United Party in South Africa, to use overseas arguments to attack the Government, and to associate itself with Britain; so that it seems to be collaborating as an enemy of that great

political prize, Independence—or, as the Ghanaians call it, FreeDOM. Politically, there is nothing to beat Freedom.

Ghana is basically a very parochial country; with all her talk about Pan-Africanism and World Statesmanship, she is not, when it comes to the push, very much interested in her neighbours. It is one of the tragedies of the situation that she is far too immersed in her internal complications to have time to look round at her allies or enemies elsewhere.

But while Ghana remains self-absorbed, her appearance to the world outside is of immense importance. There are no doubt many of Ghana's critics who would like, consciously or subconsciously, to see Ghana fail as an African experiment; and they have taken care to pick out the events in Ghana that suit their point of view. Whatever happens in Ghana, there will certainly be enough 'rough and tumble', as Nkrumah calls it, to provide ammunition for these critics, who tend to apply to Ghana standards quite different from their own. What is probably more important is the effect that Ghana's troubles will have on her friends, and here there lies some danger. For there has always tended to be a rather hazy idealism attached to the idea of African Independence; and the people in Britain particularly, who whole-heartedly supported the cry for 'FreeDOM,' were inclined to see it as a simple issue. And now that the issues are becoming more confused, and no longer clearly black-and-white, there is likely to be a reaction from the old straightforward enthusiasm for black people. Already there is a mood of disillusion and disappointment in Britain towards Nkrumah, mixed with an element of frustrated paternalism; for there are people who feel that, by not behaving in a British way after Independence, Nkrumah has somehow let down, even cheated, the British. A more realistic attitude, stripped of the old sentimentality, is obviously desirable. It is time people stopped thinking that all black men are good and all white men bad, though it would obviously be harmful if this were a general swing away from any kind of sympathy with African aspirations.

But the people to whom Nkrumah matters most, of course, are the Africans themselves. Up and down the Continent, the coloured portraits of Dr. Nkrumah hang as symbols of what an African can do. In Rhodesia and South Africa he looms up to confute the ideas of White Supremacy and African Incompetence. However little he errs, Nkrumah is bound to dis-

appoint these high idealistic hopes; and the disappointment will wound the self-confidence of African nationalism everywhere. For Africans are beginning to be themselves deceived by one of the European's favourite assumptions, that all black men are the same.

Fortunately for Africans, Dr. Nkrumah will not remain such a crucial symbol for much longer; for next door to him is a far bigger and very different African giant, on the point of stepping out to Independence—Nigeria. With eight times the population and three separate federal regions, Nigeria will soon help to relieve Ghana of her lonely and unwelcome fame. Nigerians are as disturbed as anyone at the wobbles in Ghana, and the arrival of a new member in the Independence Club will ease the tension and remind people that African countries are at least as different as European ones.

“An African way of doing things will undoubtedly emerge,” Dr. Nkrumah reminded his listeners in his last review of Independence. The first signs of this African way in Ghana appear certainly to be a little crude and unfortunate; but it is worth remembering that many of the restrictions of freedom taken for granted in most White-governed countries in Africa—control of the press, the banning of meetings, pass laws, banishment without trial—are still unheard of in Ghana. No doubt Ghana, and the whole of West Africa, will develop a very distinctive African government, in some ways better and in some ways worse than its European counterparts. But there are very few pots who are entitled to call this kettle black.