

# TESTING TIME FOR GHANA

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THE OVERTHROW OF the Ghana Government on February 24th of this year was a most serious setback to the advance of the African continent. In no less than seven independent African states military coups have taken place since the one in Algeria in June 1965. They reveal the intense pressures and strains to which the new states are subjected soon after winning their independence. In some cases the coups have been launched to overthrow progressive Governments, in others they have been launched to forestall the emergence of more radical forces which were challenging reactionary and corrupt regimes.

For a short period, it seemed that in Africa, imperialism would be able to rely successfully on economic and diplomatic pressures, the colonial state apparatus which was left behind and rigged constitutional arrangements, to keep the new states in line. In any case, after the Suez fiasco they were not able to threaten the use of traditional gunboat methods quite so readily.

Algeria, the United Arab Republic, Ghana, Mali, Congo Brazzaville, Guinea, Tanzania, in spite of pressures, emerged as a significant anti-imperialist group on the African continent. Their policies of internal planned development, support for the national liberation movement, closer relations with the Socialist countries and positive non-alignment, gave a powerful impetus to the continent as a whole.

Imperialism launched its counter-offensive. Bribery and corruption, already familiar imperialist techniques, powerful propaganda campaigns against the progressive states and their leaderships and the encouragement of opposition and dissident elements were some of the methods they used. The opposition is usually drawn from the so-called 'élite' of soldiers, civil servants, and university graduates, trained by the former colonialist rulers. They have little or no mass political basis and they resort to violence, assassination and military force to win power on behalf of their imperialist masters.

While each country has distinct and specific features which help to explain the coups which have taken place, there are some general features which it would be useful to describe before examining some details of Ghana's situation.

After independence the question arises of 'what next?' The mass of the people look to independence to bring a higher standard of living, education, social services and all the things denied them by

colonialism. The only way to achieve these benefits and to ensure political independence is to begin the long and difficult task of transforming poverty-stricken, technically backward, agrarian societies, with strong elements of tribalism and feudalism, into modern industrialized nations. Such a perspective strikes at the very roots of their unequal relations with imperialism. The struggle after independence becomes therefore, more complex, more bitter.

Some sections of the national independence movements see in independence simply the opportunity to replace the old masters; they are hostile to further change. Imperialism still has a powerful base inside these states. Monopoly capitalism still dominates their economic life, controlling sources of raw materials, the limited industries and trade. The peasants depend on the sale of their cash crop in the capitalist world market which, by price manipulations, is making most of them still poorer. Bourgeois ideology is still the main one, with the skilled and literate whose training is desperately needed for development, usually dominated by its values. Anti-communism and contempt for the people are powerful elements in the training of some of the educated sections.

Although there is tremendous pressure for change and progress the working class of the new states is still relatively weak in numbers, organisation and experience, and the numbers of Marxists is still very small.

The sharpening of internal problems coincides with the challenge to the African states of Southern Africa. Here imperialism has dug in for its last ditch stand, operating through open fascist violence. The present disunity of the African states and their economic weakness prevents their being in a position to intervene, for example, in Rhodesia. This exacerbates their internal problems and lays them open to reactionary pressures.

## **SOCIALISM DIVIDED**

These national and continental problems come to a head at a period when the full protective influence of the Socialist world cannot be fully exerted. A united Socialist sector and a united Communist Movement was one of the decisive forces on a world scale which made it possible for 27 African states to win independence in a period of four years. They are the determining factors too in creating conditions in which the non-capitalist path of development can be successfully achieved. The present division creates confusion and splits in turn within the independent states and the liberation movements. A new source of anti-Soviet propaganda has emerged to add to that coming



from the imperialist propaganda machines. The split has encouraged United States aggressiveness and consequently material resources which could have been used for aid by the Socialist states have had to be diverted.

The coinciding of these factors has increased the difficulties for the new states, and in the case of Ghana provides a background which must be taken fully into account when the reasons for the success of the coup are discussed.

The Ghana coup was carried through by a very small group of Army and Police officers, some of whom, President Nkrumah claims, were implicated in a diamond smuggling racket. It was not a mass spontaneous uprising of the people who were unarmed and in no position to retaliate with armed force against the troops. There was active resistance by the Presidential guards for a number of days.

There were, however, problems which could explain the passivity of the people in the face of the coup. There were acute economic difficulties which required important political changes of a new democratic character for their solution. Prices, especially of food were rising rapidly; wages were at a standstill; some people including leading Party members were making big money through exploiting shortages; import restrictions were, quite correctly, decided upon, but they in turn became a new source of racketeering. The balance of payments situation was serious due to the drastic fall in cocoa prices.

Closer relations with the Socialist states became yet more necessary, though this in itself involved political struggle. Urgently required were firm political measures which would have suppressed dishonest and bureaucratic elements in the Party and state and which would have aroused the creative political activity of the mass of the people.

The immediate, urgent, economic question after that of solving the food problem was to make the State Corporations pay, and around this acute struggles developed.

The achievements of the Ghana Government were by any standards remarkable. Social services, the Volta Dam, a developing infrastructure, growing new industries as well as the improvement of cocoa quality and output, were only a part of the regime's great successes. The country was on the eve of a breakthrough towards higher levels of economic activity and it was this that the coup was intended to stop. It had been possible to preserve a wide degree of national unity around Government policy up to the stage where central planning had been able to create a modern infra-structure, power resources and some industries. Then the struggle for control of these assets began.

They have been wrested from the people as a whole and are being handed over to local business sections and foreign monopolies. Some of the State Corporations are now up for sale, others will probably remain state-owned to provide cheap services for capitalist enterprises.

There were, for a few days, some illusions, inside and outside Ghana, that the coup was intended simply to force out corrupt and bureaucratic elements. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The coup was designed to change the whole system of Government and prevent any further developments to socialism in Ghana.

### **THE LEADERS OF THE COUP**

The leaders of the coup were with one exception, members of the former colonial, army and police force, which scarcely indicates a high level of national consciousness. Every Army Officer on the National Liberation Council is Sandhurst trained, the police officers are Hendon products. The other supporters of the coup are the Chiefs, whose role in the building of a new modern state was inevitably declining, and the educated civil servants, specialists and university teachers.

Ghana's present rulers, therefore, are a self-interested group representative of those sections who were created and utilised by Britain in its system of indirect rule.

The British ruling class has always kept in touch with these sections in the hope that they would overthrow the regime. In a recent letter to *The Times*, General Alexander emphasized the bonds of respect and affection existing between British officers and the Ghana army and adds 'Ever since I left Ghana in 1961 I have been in private correspondence with officers and other ranks of their armed forces'.

The *Sunday Telegraph* described the head of the National Liberation Council as 'A bit of a Puritan. Ankrah is anti-Socialist, let alone anti-Communist, and reckons his salad days were at the Staff College, Camberley'.

In their speeches the N.L.C. make frequent references to the Almighty, whom they clearly consider is 100 per cent on their side. The outlook of the intellectuals can perhaps best be gauged by the National Liberation Council's complaint that President Nkrumah placed uneducated men to rule over them. Their speeches frequently refer to rather nebulous eternal values and spiritual truths, ideas carried through from their mission schools.

'Speaking at the ceremony Mr. William Ofori-Atta, an Accra barrister, noted that it was praiseworthy that top Army and Police Officers of the new regime should come to confess that the glory of



the new-born revolution must be paid to God and not to man.' *Ghana Today*, July 13th, 1966.

At the recent Degree Day Ceremony of the University of Ghana, the newly-appointed Chairman of the University Council hailed the introduction of a new era of 'academic freedom' for the University, and in the next breath warned lecturers still sympathetic to the overthrown regime, to clear off the campus. He then enunciated this gem of idealist thought 'A University is after all a universal institution, and it will (sic) be absurd to think that the purpose of a University should change with its location and time. Throughout the ages all great centres of learning have kept as a sacred trust the role of pursuing truth, even to the bitter end'. After paying lip service to the need for science and technology, he embellished his speech with a quotation from that well-known imperialist Disraeli.

These quotations serve to illustrate the kind of outlook of many of the leading supporters of the new regime and the character of the problem that the Convention People's Party had to tackle in fighting for a scientific socialist theory. This kind of reactionary thinking is characteristic of the leading members of the tribal parties, and of the leadership of the United Gold Coast Convention from whom Nkrumah broke to form a new Party.

Nkrumah founded the Convention People's Party in 1947, appealing to the youth, the workers, farmers and market women, over the heads of their traditional chiefs and of the professional sections. Forms of highly effective mass propaganda and protest were developed through mass rallies, boycotts, slogans, songs and banners. Some of the Party leadership still worked as if these methods were adequate to mobilise the people for the more complex task of building a new society.

At the time of the coup, the Party was in a transitional stage between national liberation movement, embracing wide sections of the people behind the demand for independence, and a Party of a vanguard type, unified on the basis of a common revolutionary scientific ideology, capable of applying a general line to the detailed problems facing it and imbuing a sense of discipline and an example of personal devotion to the cause of socialism.

## **PETTY BOURGEOIS ELEMENTS**

To transform the Party meant changing some of its leadership which was in the main petty bourgeois in outlook. This reflected the general class position of the country as a whole where the mass of the people are farmers and small traders. The opportunist sections of the Party

leadership panicked at the serious character of the problems facing them, which could not be solved by making speeches at rallies or praising the President. To clear their path for a retreat they were working for a purge of some of the most militant and devoted elements of the Party and the consequent in-fighting was one of the factors preventing the Party from mobilizing the people to solve the food problem and smash racketeering.

The Trades Union Congress, 386,754 strong, out of a population of over 7 million, was a wing of the Party. To make the organization of the working class a wing of a Party dominated by the petty bourgeoisie, meant in practice, that the working class was consistently hampered in its struggles to give leadership to the people as a whole. Some leading Party people supported by the Civil Servants and managers, resisted the development of joint production committees and joint consultation in industry in the name of the leading role of the Party. The T.U.C. was expected to restrain wage demands and yet mobilize the working class for increased production and sacrifices while some members of the Party were getting rich quick, making no sacrifices and exploiting shortages.

In 1965, on the eve of May Day, which was celebrated with great enthusiasm, the President outlined the leading role of the working class in building a socialist Ghana. This obviously alarmed the petty bourgeois sections of the Party who did everything possible to sabotage the efforts of the young and relatively inexperienced T.U.C. leadership. The working class was too weak to resist these manoeuvres. Only a very small number understood clearly what was required though undoubtedly the mass of the people were ready to respond to a revolutionary lead.

It was difficult to obtain a clear picture of the character of branch life in the Convention People's Party. Obviously, there were wide differences from branch to branch, some were active, many seemed to be moribund. Party membership was still open to anyone who cared to join. Many officials of the Party failed to generate democratic forms of activity and pressures and some of them wanted to imitate the standards of life of the colonial officials of the past. The only way in which corruption and bureaucracy could have been smashed was to allow the mass membership of the Party to feel sure that if they fought, the Party would be behind them. In some branches the members could not feel that assurance.

Measures were being taken to speed up the transformation of the Party. There was a new category of membership introduced called Vanguard Activists, the Ideological Institute was established at



Winneba, *The Spark*, 'a Socialist Weekly of the African Revolution' was founded. All these could, given time, have made their impact.

Nkrumah encouraged the fight for scientific socialist concepts. Nkrumaism is close, in many respects to a Marxist position, and *Consciencism* raises such important questions as the impact on Africa of Christianity and of Islam, and the degree to which traditional African communal forms of social organization and values can operate as positive factors in the struggle for independence and socialism.

Many of the ideas, however, are still not very well developed and leave the field clear for debate in which many anti-Marxists, claiming to be Nkrumaists can find some support for their views. It was nevertheless an important stage forward from the ideology of African socialism and has significant creative elements within it.

Scientific socialist ideas were not yet widely accepted or understood in the Convention People's Party. It was not ideology, but Nkrumah himself who was the unifying factor in the Party. Consequently there was a strong tendency for the fight for policy to become a fight to win his approval. The struggle from below for policies was by-passed. While this was a short cut to getting some work done, it developed an atmosphere of intrigue, access to Nkrumah becoming an important source of political influence.

It was the opportunist elements of the Party who actively fostered the adulation of Nkrumah. He himself initiated press articles and discussions on its dangers but in practice there was vacillation. This reflected, not vanity or a lust for power, but the very real problems of the fight for collective leadership and for democratic centralism in a Party which was not yet led by the working class and not yet firmly based on scientific socialism.

The transforming of the state in Ghana was no less complicated than that of transforming the Party or the economy. The major contradiction was that while the Government adopted progressive policies, the day-to-day administration of them lay with the Civil Service which was in general out of sympathy with the aims and which operated like the British Civil Service in whose traditions it had been trained. To counter this, politically reliable people were often given very big responsibilities for which they had little or no training, and overburdened as most of them were, they did not always show up favourably alongside the old guard.

These were some of the more serious difficulties that the Convention People's Party had to solve. Given time they would have overcome them; unfortunately imperialism was able to take advantage of a particularly difficult period to intervene successfully.

## **LESSONS OF THE SETBACK**

The coup in Ghana does not mean by any means the end of the fight for Socialism in that country. The setback is serious but not irretrievable. Other revolutions have had their setbacks, the important thing is to try and learn the lessons from them.

The National Liberation Council is no nearer solving Ghana's problems than it was on the day it took over. It has abandoned the only way of doing that, the non-capitalist way. Food prices are still rising, corruption goes on but more openly, education is being cut back, the country is being parcelled out to monopoly capitalism. Great claims were made that the N.L.C. respected individual freedoms and yet there are more people without trial in Ghana's prisons today than at any time in Ghana's history. The corrupt elements of the C.P.P. are being allowed to buy their way out of prison by yielding up some of their ill-gotten gains, others are denouncing everything the Party stood for. The incorruptible, the convinced socialists, are still in prison six months after their arrest.

The beginnings of the fight back are already emerging. The National Liberation Council is complaining about unrest, which they choose to call hooliganism, there is trouble in the secondary schools, there are strikes which the Council say are illegal, and which they threaten they will investigate. They lecture the people on the need to tighten their belts and not expect miracles.

This is one of the most difficult periods Ghana has ever experienced. It is a stern testing time from which the forces loyal to independence and socialism will fight through, more unified, disciplined and with greater clarity, to mobilize the people to get rid of the arbitrary rule of soldiers and officers and resume with surer steps their advance to a socialist Ghana.