

# GHANA: THE MORNING AFTER (II)

IAN COLVIN

*African Correspondent of the 'Daily Telegraph'*

EVERYBODY in Ghana considers himself important, and everybody is seized by the importance of Ghana. The attitude of the grinning, excitable man in toga and black sandals at the street corner makes that abundantly clear. Those who look in from the outside and say that democracy is a luxury which this infant State of five million souls cannot afford, or that Ghana is doing well, because there has been very little bloodshed in its birth pangs and only a few deportations since, are not aware of the real issues. The reality is seen more keenly by the Fanti, Ashanti, Ewes and Moslem tribesmen of the North who make up Africa's newest State. They have come to a curious realization, which has grown with the growth of government itself. Their weal or woe is bound up with a small group of people whom they rarely, if ever, see. Their old dependence on the local chief is gone, or going fast. The British chief regional officer has become a cipher of the Central Government in Accra. A handful of Africans with no particular background, who got on top through energy and enthusiasm, may have the say over their fellow Ghanaians for years to come. That is why the ordinary Ghanaian has become more sensitive to his own importance in the past six months. That is why Ghana is important, because the kind of self-government that is being applied there, and the way it is tolerated, will set a pattern for other emergent African States to copy.

The world press has been accused of subjecting the Ghana Government to unfair scrutiny and expecting it to adhere in all its dealings to the laborious methods of Westminster parliamentary democracy. It has been pointed out that other Governments have done much worse things than Ghana. I think it is just that sensitiveness to the values of individual freedom and to world opinion, in contrast to the leaden disregard for both that we find in Communist states, that makes Accra a fascinating place for any journalist. Opinions and measures are shifting all the time. Officials confirm as fact reports that are by no means official. Attitudes are radically changed overnight. There is a refreshing inconsequence in Government

counsel. Here is something in the making, with the various ingredients of good and bad. Above all, there is individualism, and individuals make news. Any man may become a cause, whether it be Nkrumah in his gaolbird days, or Amadu Baba banished to Nigeria last year without reason shown, or Mr. Christopher Shawcross, Q.C., excluded from practising in Ghana within a few days of being accepted as a brother by the Ghana bar. And the searchlight of world publicity is bound to swing onto a land where such things happen. Each of these cases has been talked about up and down Ghana and in the world outside. When it is a case of Government *versus* the individual, there is an added piquancy.

The mood of some of Ghana's Opposition leaders, when I was last there, reminded me not a little of the spirit of John Donne's celebrated 124th Devotion, which I would paraphrase in applying it to the new African State. 'All that she does belongs to all.' The bell tolling for another today tolls tomorrow for you. Although the bell of authority tolled for a few only in 1957, we should ask ourselves how many or how few would have to be treated in like harshness and injustice to take all spirit and heart out of public affairs and make a one-party state. The Government has denied having any such intention and has accused the Opposition of uttering the shriller threats. But the actions have all come from the Government side. I can add up a short list of the victimized in 1957: one politician, Henry Thompson, was severely beaten up; two journalists, Bankole Timothy and Ian Colvin, were barred from Ghana. So also was Mr. Shawcross. Four tribal or religious leaders were deported or exiled, including Amadu Baba, whose replacement as Sheriff of the Moslem community of Kumasi has been the subject of contention ever since. These are not large numbers, but they are telling cases and likely to strike fear by example. I do not go on to accuse Ghana of being a dictatorship. But it is certainly not on its way to becoming a model to all African States, a kind of cantonal Utopia with homespun party leaders. And that it might well have done, being subject to no outside pressures. It had only to digest or accept its internal tribal differences and the war of words between Ashanti and the South. It had only to reconcile itself to the probability that the Opposition parties would grow stronger and noisier as time went on. The fact is that outside Russia no party can claim to have been appointed to lead a nation for perpetuity.

Not a shadow of evidence has been found to support Government allegations that the main Opposition party in Ghana intended to seize power by a coup. I trace this failure to graduate, by which Ghana has forfeited some of the vast fund of goodwill that the Western world bore towards it, not to the odd and confused character of Nkrumah himself, but to causes more deeply rooted in history and class rivalry.

In the month of August, when I arrived in Ghana on a routine visit, the 1957 Nationality and Citizenship Act was being applied for the first time. It is a significant piece of legislation and one that passed into law soon after independence without arousing the controversy that it deserved. It is a restrictive law that departs from the natural rule that a child may be citizen of the country in which it is born. It stipulates that to have a right to Ghana citizenship, a person must not only be native of that country, but one of his or her six nearest forebears must also have been born there. Naturalization is also possible under the 1957 Act, but that depends on the goodwill of the Government.

The frontiers of West Africa run north and south between the coast and the Sahara. The peoples of West Africa are strewn from east to west like a layer cake, coastal tribes, forest dwellers and nomadic peoples of the grasslands. Thus there were bound to be many who could not securely qualify for Ghana citizenship, and failing that, would have no other citizenship, except as stateless members of the British Commonwealth to which Ghana still belongs. All this perplexity was either skilfully concealed or entirely overlooked by the shapers of the Act. Such a law, applied in bad faith, would be ideal for removing political opponents, or intimidating and extorting obedience from those natives of Ghana whose documentation on their parents might not satisfy the terms of the Act.

It was on this very law that I came unwittingly into conflict with the Ghana Government last year, because I missed no opportunity of reporting how it was working in application. Instead of African embracing African fraternally in the new State, searching enquiry was being made in the Immigration Department and the Ministry of the Interior into the parentage of those who were active in the Opposition. Some who could not prove citizenship under the new law—or would have had some difficulty in proving it—were liable to deportation. The liked and respected Amadu Baba was among them. He was a benefactor of the Moslems of Ashanti, had built a mosque in

Kumasi, and become a focus for Moslem opposition to the domination of the Convention People's Party. He sought to contest his deportation order in the Courts, and my reporting of his case and the passions that it aroused was held by some people in the Ghana Government to merit a charge of contempt of court, or intent to incite prejudice. Amadu Baba's process in Court was stopped by a special Deportation Bill, which hustled him and his Imam out of the country. The case against me began to be heard and was later dropped altogether.

Such was the complicated issue which led to much rethinking on African self-government. It should be said that, both in the contempt case and in the deportation case, Court proceedings were conducted in accordance with the highest traditions of Western justice. But it should also be noted that afterwards the Acting Chief Justice, Mr. Quashie Idun, was sacked, either for allowing the case to be brought against me in the first place, or for deciding in my favour when he sat on the bench. The costs of 200 guineas awarded to me were never paid, and my defence counsel was threatened with arbitrary arrest if he crossed the road out of Accra airport. This stir happened at a time when Ghana's most talented minister, Mr. K. A. Gbedemah, was abroad in quest of £300,000,000 to finance a huge hydro-electric project, upon which Ghana must depend if it is not to remain on a one-crop economy. Plainly the Government was acting as its own worst enemy. Such behaviour, though part of the attempt by Dr. Nkrumah as a matter of policy to show the Opposition where power lay, was instinctive rather than calculated. Ghana is £299,999,780 the poorer to-day for its headiness in 1957.

News came on the eve of the New Year that Mr. Krobo Edusei, Minister of the Interior, had suspended a state of emergency over Ashanti. With what legality? That is a question that must always be asked about the doings of this irrepressible, tough little Party boss. His action emphasized the continuing tension between the Accra Government and the kingdom of Ashanti, and the fact that wrongs to individuals are not easily forgotten. The Ashanti Moslems have steadily refused ever since September to appoint a Government nominee as Zerikin or Sheriff of their community in Kumasi in the place of the exiled Amadu Baba. Edusei, one of the men responsible for creating the tension, apparently judged it high enough to warrant a state of emergency.

Tension there certainly is. But we must beware of taking up a sanctimonious racial attitude over Ghana. We cannot say that Black is bad, and White good, any more than we can concede to the African all the natural virtues. I would rather be tried in a Ghana Court than in Jugoslavia or Russia, where, to use the common racial parlance, 'Europeans' administer justice. If we compare Krobo Edusei to Hermann Goering, and Dr. Nkrumah to one of the dictators whose methods he confesses to having studied, we must admit that the two Europeans, Goering and Hitler, were incomparably less humane and moderate than these two Africans. When the White man applies the broad term 'European' to the discussing of African affairs, he must admit that ironically the names of some of the worst criminals in political history hang round his neck like the bones of the albatross.

I did not find Black men in Ghana exclusively occupied with evil, and White men in fending it off. I found many Africans combating it energetically and some White men unhappily condoning it, on the score that they were bound in loyalty to obey as members of the Ghana Civil Service.

Equally I would think it wrong to make some special allowance, or use some special measure, in judging the actions of the Ghana Government and the reactions of the Ghanaian people. "I am preparing a Bill to deal with traitors," exclaims Mr. Edusei and explains in an aside that he is dealing with simple people who do not understand any rule less rough than he metes out. He has been rightly taken up on this attitude by the *Ashanti Pioneer*, which argues that the people of Ghana are able to understand and reason for themselves and have the right to expect their Government to explain its case to the people when inviting their support. I endorse this view of the Ghanaian. Whether it is a boxing match, a game of football, a parliamentary speech, a boundary dispute before a Chief's court, or a debate in a political club, the Ghanaian is an earnest, thoughtful and patient listener. He has a sense of justice and he is keen to detect fraud. He certainly has more time than the overtaxed and overworked European to argue the sense of what his Government expects him to do, and if he does not like it, the probability is that he will ignore or evade the law. And the Government will do nothing about it.

In Egypt or in Syria there is no Opposition. In Ghana it exists, and its vigour and wariness may have done a lot towards

keeping the political climate bearable. There is debate and argument on what is proper for the State to do. Fantastic opinions can be aired, such as that of Mr. Aaron Ofori-Atta, Minister of Local Government, whom I once heard exclaim in parliament: "If we can deport an alien, why have we no right to deport a Ghanaian? . . . If your face causes a riot, we have the right to deport you." I do not agree with those observers who brush off such remarks as not really meant or not mattering. Words used by a Minister of the Crown must have some weight, and it would be wrong if they did not. To show the reverse of the medallion, let me add the words that Mr. Phineas Quass, Q.C., was enabled to say in a Kumasi court on the subject of deportation, in this matter of the two Moslems. "In my submission a person has an irrefutable right to remain in his own country, whether he is good, bad or indifferent." This is an important issue, important for Africa as a whole. Neither Ghana nor any other emergent African State can afford to make a practice of deporting those who do not agree with the Government.

I revert to my opening theme. Important principles are being argued in Ghana, so far without bloodshed, though with some injustice and some intimidation. Ghanaians know what is going on. They know that the issue has got to be argued to the bitter end, even if the injustice committed affects only a few people directly. I have been sorry to observe the effects of intimidation on some people in Ghana, the caution of some barristers, for instance, when it is a matter of taking up a case against the Government. I have been impressed, on the other hand, with the courage of some others in the face of victimization, the threat of organized thuggery, and the enormous temptation to court favour and adulate those in power. There is a love of personal independence and fair play, and a great determination not to be ruled by fear.

The past year, since Ghana achieved independence in March, 1957, has not, to sum up, utterly marred the future hopes of the infant State. Ghana is not, by any means, doomed to failure. Nobody has proved that Africans cannot govern themselves; with Ghana's senior posts still half staffed with British expatriates, it is still much too early to say that. It has been amply proved in 1957 that Ghanaians know how to run an Opposition. Has Ghana, in fact, got the Government that it deserves?