

The Black Man's Burden

Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism, by Kwame Nkrumah, *New York: International Publishers, 1966. + 280 pp. \$7.50.*

IT IS NOT QUITE ten years since the Union Jack fluttered down from the government buildings of the Gold Coast Colony, over which it had flown for more than a century, and was replaced by the Black Star flag of the Republic of Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah, the founding father of the new republic, entered into office amid the wild jubilations of his countrymen and to the cheers and well-wishes of liberals almost everywhere.

Eleven months later a journalist on the staff of a British-owned African newspaper paid a visit to the capital city of Accra. He found that the rejoicing had largely subsided. The bubbling "high life" ditty, "*Jaguar, Fredge Full, Been To,*" which had promised abundance along with nationalism and independence, could still be heard, but the voices that sang it had assumed a slightly plaintive or slightly cynical tone. In a walk from the harbor to the center of the town, the visitor observed that the great stormdrains in the meandering streets still served the populace as places of ablution and other daily necessities. The heat was intense and the atmosphere steamy and fetid. Flies swarmed in clouds everywhere. In the marketplace there were discontented mutterings, both among the "market mummies" and their customers. Butter was sixty-three cents a pound, sugar ten cents a pound, prices that in 1958 would have seemed steep to an American housewife, but were all but prohibitive to natives attempting to subsist on meager wages or none. Eggs were \$1.22 a dozen, and it was actually cheaper

to import them. A cook or house servant earned \$18 a month, a nursemaid \$9. One could engage a washerman for the whole of one's household laundry for only \$3 a month. But a Ghanian who earned \$150 a month, and there were a few such, was obliged to pay almost a third of it for the rental of a single room with a hall entrance, and since most such tenants had families, the normal number of persons occupying the room was five. A man, even if he had the money, could not buy or rent a house, for none was being built. The existing houses were wooden or corrugated iron shacks. Some had never known paint, and most seemed in imminent danger of collapsing.

In short, Nkrumah's promised utopia was nowhere in evidence, and a large part of the population no longer regarded him as a hero and their liberator. The leaders of the opposition—for in those days there *was* an opposition—to his Convention Peoples' Party admitted privately that independence had been premature and that the prospects for a free, democratic government would have been infinitely better if it had been delayed for some decades. Out of a population of 4,620,000, there were only about 10,000 children in secondary schools and only a few hundred in colleges or universities. This was the generation that was expected to take over at the next change of responsibility. Not surprisingly, however, when the change came it was the military that took over, since it represented the alternative to chaos or communism. This, as historical experience has shown, first in Latin America after the Wars of Independence, later in the "emergent nations" of Africa and some of Asia, is the pattern of evolution to be expected wherever democratic principles exist as political abstractions rather than as usages supported by custom and hereditary institutions. For though the people of the Gold Coast after independence loved to talk of themselves as citizens of Ghana, they continued to think of themselves primarily as tribesfolk, as Ashanti

or Akan, or as Ewe or Ga, or as Mamprusi or Dagarti.

Those who may ask how much Nkrumah did in his nine years of power to promote the welfare of his own people will find the answer in this his latest book. Though it was written before his deposition *in absentia*, it shows very plainly that his main interest is not Ghana but the whole of black Africa, for whom he has appointed himself spokesman. In page upon page of conflicting statements, of historical distortions, and here and there a sprinkling of noble truths, he shows very clearly that he was never the man who could have brought prosperity and progress to Ghana by an intelligent encouragement of foreign capital and Western technology. He was much too ambitious, too self-centered, too much the born demagogue for that. But more than any other of the black politicians who climbed into history after the dissolution of the British, French, and Belgian empires, he has been responsible for the division of the thirty-five new-born nations of Africa into the Monrovia and Addis Ababa groups. When he took power there was gold in the country, represented not only by the unmined deposits but also by foreign assets in the banks. There were industrial diamonds in vast quantities waiting to be taken from the ground. The cocoa that the Gold Coast had produced so abundantly for export was selling in the world markets for £550 a ton. When he was deposed, his henchmen crushed, and his Chinese Communist collaborators expelled, the country was virtually bankrupt.

Nkrumah had begun his career as an agitator with a slogan parodied from the Gospel: "Seek ye first the political freedom, and all else will follow!" to which the late Winston Churchill is said to have retorted with a parody inversion of one of his own famous phrases: "Give them the job and they will finish the tools!" Whether apocryphal or authentic, the words were prophetic. None of the blessings which Nkrumah had promised would fol-

low independence ever materialized. For one reason and another the capital funds needed for the expansion of primary education, the improvement of agriculture, the exploitation of resources, the development of health and sanitation programs, could never be found, though plenty of funds were available to subsidize the civil wars in the Congo. Private investors were frightened away from Ghana by increasing restrictions and harassments, which included exchange control and the requirements of special permits for imports. The Communists, whose influence over Nkrumah's policies became more and more obvious, were generous with applause and advice, but had nothing to offer him in the way of hard currency.

The example of Ghana has shown once again that economic autarky is impossible in an underdeveloped country. Some African rulers like Dr. Kaunda of Zambia have faced this fact realistically. Zambia has some nationally owned copper mines at Ndola, others at Broken Hill are owned by the Anglo-American Corporation. Kaunda recognizes, as Nkrumah did not, that if he were to enforce a decree of equal wages for European and native mine employees, no copper would be mined. Consequently he allows the Europeans to draw five times the pay of the Zambians and to live under conditions of residential and recreational segregation.

In this book Nkrumah alleges that half the domestic product of Zambia and Gabon, and a third of the product of Guinea de Sao, Angola, Lybia, Swaziland, Southwest Africa, and Rhodesia goes to foreign concerns or into the incomes of white technicians and white settlers. One might well, however, ask whither the domestic product of Ghana has gone. At the time of independence the new republic had reserves amounting to 179 million pounds sterling. When Nkrumah produced his budget for 1965 these had shrunk to 40 million pounds, all of which could be exhausted by paying for current commitments. Nevertheless, the budget included

several grandiose extravagances, calculated to enhance the dictator's prestige but of little or no benefit to his poverty-stricken subjects. Among such items were the planned Accra-Tema motorway, to be constructed according to the world's highest engineering standards, the purchase of a new frigate for his navy at a cost of four million pounds, and some new VC-10s for the Ghana Airways—all this at a time when the cocoa, which normally accounted for 60 per cent of the national income, could not be sold on the world market because of a dispute over the price which had dropped to £190 per ton. It seems that Nkrumah was confidently anticipating that Great Britain and the United States would come to his rescue with a series of emergency loans. But London, after a four months' study of his proposal, turned it down. Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, Italy, and Japan, to all of which he had also made application, followed suit. Finally, even long-forbearing Washington felt obliged to refuse him. It is not known precisely how much Nkrumah was seeking to raise in loans, but it has been estimated that his various requests totaled one billion, 250 million pounds sterling.

Meanwhile the unhappy tribesfolk of Ghana had experienced the transition of their demagogue into their despot, on the pattern familiar to the city-states of classical antiquity. For a time open talk of revolution and even of tyrannicide could be heard in the streets of Accra. But Nkrumah in his residence in Christianborg Castle, surrounded by his bodyguards and henchmen, proved unassailable. He proceeded to crush his constitutional opposition by the simple expedient of throwing its members in jail without accusation or trial, there to be tortured at whim of himself or of his followers. The "all else" that was promised to follow political independence proved to be another police state. Dr. Joseph Danquah, leader of the United Party, was held in solitary confinement until he died. One consequence of this cruelty was to provoke the hostility of neigh-

boring Nigeria and its leader, the late Sir Abubaka Falewa Balewa, a man of genuine devotion to democratic ideals. When it became known that Dr. Danquah had been denied the drugs that might have saved his life, a large section of the Nigerian press demanded an all-African condemnation of Nkrumah's abuses of power.

After the military coup in Ghana prison warders testified that Nkrumah had visited his dying adversary to beg that he not be haunted. It is known that after Danquah's death Nkrumah consulted various witch doctors, and then left Accra for a two weeks' period of purification by fasting, prayers, and meditation. Evidently, his indoctrination in Marxist materialism had

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not been quite strong enough to cure all his ancestral superstitions.

In external affairs Nkrumah's policies were confusing and paradoxical. In the Congolese war, as the great champion of Pan-African unity, he had supported the Leopoldville faction against the Katangan separatists. But after the United Nations forces, for which Ghana had supplied a contingent, were withdrawn, and when Moise Tshombe had assumed the premiership, and when President Kasavubu and General Mobutu were struggling to retain all six provinces, which was in line with Nkrumah's professed aim of a single continental state, he switched his support to the Stanleyville rebels, and Accra became one of the main points in Africa for the piping of arms and ammunition to the rebel leader, Christopher Gbenye. Nkrumah would like his readers to believe that the mutinies which occurred early in 1964 in the armed forces of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda were incidents manufactured by Great Britain as pretexts for military intervention. Actually, it was the leaders of those nations, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, and Milton Obote, who asked for the intervention. The Royal Marines remained as long as their presence was requested by the respective governments and were then withdrawn. The incident that had really touched off these aborted rebellions was the coup in Zanzibar which resulted in the overthrow of the sultan by Communist guerrillas trained in Cuba and the loss to the United States of an astronomical tracking station.

Though it is full of self-contradictions Nkrumah's latest book seems to be a repudiation of his original slogan. He is now saying that political independence is just another form of colonialism unless it is accompanied by economic independence. But how is economic independence in the "emergent nations" ever to be achieved without the aid of Western capital and technical resources? Nkrumah's answer, in effect, is this: "Very well. Bring in your capital and your technical experts. Im-

prove our land, open our mines, build our roads and factories; but leave all the profits from your operations behind you for the black rulers to expend as their designs or ambitions may determine." This is Nkrumah's fifth big book on Africa. He will now have leisure to write many more, and also, if he wishes, to travel far and wide—though not (if he values his life) to his native land.

Reviewed by ALLEN T. BLOUNT

Annus Mirabilis

1933: Characters In Crisis, by Herbert Feis, *Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966. xiv + 366 pp. \$7.50.*

IN A BRIEF introduction to this memoir Dr. Feis says that his first intention was "only to tell of my own experiences and observations. But as I went along, these seemed subordinate and marginal." So he enlarged his canvas to give "a telescopic view" of the way Washington confronted the problems of 1933, certainly a year in which the seed productive of later whirlwinds was abundantly sown.

The result is a somewhat disjointed volume, readable because of the candid treatment of important and self-important personalities, but unsatisfactory in its uneven definition of policies followed during the first year of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. This defect, however, is partly inherent in the attempt to dike off so brief a section of the flow of events. And it is also partly due to the haphazard improvisation of many early New Deal measures, as immune to close analysis as iridescent bubbles.

The historically valuable part of the book, and that which occupies its longest part, is the close-knit and well-documented story of the ill-fated London Monetary and Economic Conference, convened on June 12, 1933, and adjourned in dismal failure 45