

NKRUMAH AND GOLD COAST

IDRIS COX

DURING recent years more has been written about the Gold Coast than any other British colony in Africa. This month marks the fifth anniversary of Dr. Nkrumah's striking victory in the elections of February, 1951, when the Convention People's Party won 34 out of the 38 contested seats. Nkrumah was in prison at the time, and was released as 'an act of grace' by the British Governor to enable him to take up his position as Chief Minister. In these five years, Nkrumah has maintained his leadership of the C.P.P. and is now first Prime Minister of the Gold Coast. Whatever may be the final estimation of his political record there can be no doubt that his career has been a colourful one, as may be seen from a recent biography,* written by a Gold Coast journalist.

Kwame Nkrumah was by no means the first nationalist leader in the Gold Coast. Dr. Azikiwe (now Premier in Eastern Nigeria) and Wallace Johnson (Sierra Leone) had formed the West African Youth League and were stirring the Gold Coast people into action long before Nkrumah became interested in politics. Then in 1947, Dr. Danquah launched the United Gold Coast Convention, of which Nkrumah became the General Secretary in 1948. It was not long before differences on policy arose in the leadership, and a year later Nkrumah formed the Convention People's Party.

During this period he was under heavy fire from the Colonial Office. The Watson Commission (appointed to investigate shots fired at a procession of ex-servicemen in 1948) declared that Nkrumah

appears while in Britain to have had Communist affiliations . . . (and) proposes a programme which is all too familiar to those who have studied the technique of countries which have fallen the victims of Communist enslavement . . . (and) has never abandoned his aims for a Union of West African Soviet Socialist Republics. . . .

What a contrast to the present attitude of the Colonial Office! Today it presents Nkrumah as the 'model' Prime Minister. Tory and Labour leaders proclaim him as a great statesman, whose fine example should be followed in all other colonies which are 'advancing to self-government'. During those three years, 1948-51, there is no doubt that Nkrumah expressed the growing opposition of the people to imperialist domination. Upon his release from

**Kwame Nkrumah*, by Bankole Timothy. (George Allen & Unwin, 16s.)

prison in 1951 he was even bold enough to declare 'I am a Marxian Socialist and an undenominational Christian', and claimed that 'From Lenin I took ideas for the party's local organisation'. The fact that these declarations were made (even though there is no evidence of their translation into practice) was itself significant. It revealed that the great majority of the people of the Gold Coast were not afraid to give their allegiance to a leader who was accused of association with Communist ideas. After five years Nkrumah's influence weakened considerably in the 1954 elections, following attacks that he made on some of the best C.P.P. stalwarts. The most outstanding C.P.P. victory in the 1951 elections had been that of Mr. Pobee Biney, engine-driver and trade union leader, who defeated Sir Tsibu Darku IX, the most prominent pro-British chief. Mr. Pobee Biney and Mr. Anthony Woode (both pioneers of the C.P.P.) have now been expelled for daring to attend an international conference organised by the World Federation of Trade Unions. Marxist publications and journals are banned, including the *Labour Monthly* and the *Daily Worker*. Anyone suspected of Communist views is refused employment in the public service, and regulations are enforced to cancel the passports of delegates appointed to attend any international function which is held behind the 'iron curtain' erected by British and U.S. imperialism.

While all this has not strangled the progressive movement, it has encouraged the reactionary feudal elements to raise their heads higher. Criticism, and discontent with Nkrumah, has grown, though among the progressive forces this is being silenced to some extent by the pledge that 'full self-government' would be achieved in 1956. This is therefore the time to appraise the political record and achievements of the Nkrumah Government in the past five years.

There are those who find themselves incapable of presenting an objective picture of Nkrumah's life and work, and his biographer is one of them. He is presented as a brilliant student, great orator, astute politician, talented man, and superb idealist. Whatever weaknesses exist are ascribed, not to Nkrumah, but to the 'yes-men', and the shortage of 'efficient men' in the leadership. Equally, Mr. Fenner Brockway, in a review of this book elsewhere, gives a fanciful vision of great advances in education and health services under Nkrumah. Of course, there has been a limited improvement. No Government could exist unless these services were raised above the disgraceful level of 1951, but there is no evidence of any basic change in economic and social conditions.

The truth is that imperialism still dominates the Gold Coast. Its economy and trade are attuned to the interests of imperialism. Wages are on a starvation level, and only 6 per cent. of the workers are engaged in manufacture. Though Nkrumah is the Prime Minister the decisive powers of government are in the hands of the British Governor. The main banks, insurance firms, shipping companies, mining firms, oil firms, manufacture, and import merchants are owned and controlled by British and other foreign interests. The United Africa Company alone (subsidiary of Unilever) controls one-third of the import trade and is the biggest licensed buying agent for the Cocoa Marketing Board. Daily minimum wage rates vary from 3s. for unskilled workers to 6s. for semi-skilled, and a maximum of 10s. for skilled workers—with an average of 45 to 50 hours a week. Food prices have doubled since 1948. There is no system of unemployment insurance, free medical service or widows' and old age pensions. There is one doctor for every 22,000 of the population, and one registered dentist for every 70,000. This is in contrast to the enormous wealth which is taken out of the Gold Coast. In the nine years since the war the surplus of exports over imports totalled £150 million and is now at the rate of £44 million a year. Sterling assets of the Gold Coast in British banks are now over £160 million, and record profits are being made by the big overseas firms. The country is mainly dependent on cocoa; the high price of cocoa on the world market enables the Government to extract enormous export duties from cocoa. A serious decline in the artificial high level of cocoa prices would destroy the main prop of the Gold Coast Budget. It is not surprising that the cocoa farmers (who have to sell their cocoa at one-third the market price) should express their discontent. They represent only one factor among the several divergent streams of opposition to the Nkrumah Government, which is now being canalised by the National Liberation Movement.

The Gold Coast is made up of four main territories. These include the northern territories (mainly feudal), Ashanti (main cocoa area), Togoland (trust territory), and the Colony (in the south). The N.L.M. has its base in Ashanti and brings together discontented elements varying from cocoa farmers, feudal elements demanding greater autonomy, and former C.P.P. leaders. This itself is a 'mixed-bag' but it is now actively co-operating with even more mixed elements, including the Northern People's Congress and the Togoland Congress. Even before the growth of this heterogeneous movement, the 1954 elections had revealed a serious decline in Nkrumah's

influence. His biographer claims that only one in four of the electors voted against the C.P.P. It is a mystery where he gets these figures from. The official results show that the total poll was 716,509 (59 per cent. of the registered electors). In the north the opposition vote was double that of the C.P.P. In Togoland it was slightly higher, and in Ashanti slightly lower. Only in the south did the C.P.P. win a substantial majority of votes over the opposition. It got 70 per cent. of the seats due only to the unequal distribution of them. This combined opposition of diverse political trends presents a serious challenge to the Nkrumah Government. If it succeeds there is no guarantee that it would represent a step forward—and it could mean a serious backward step. All the more reason for Nkrumah to recognise that the advance of the Gold Coast towards complete self-government depends on the extent to which the working class and progressive elements become the vanguard of liberation. It will depend not on vain professions of being 'Marxian Socialists' but the application of Marxism to the actual struggle to make the Gold Coast free and independent.

The Convention People's Party was born in the struggle against British imperialism. When its leadership stimulated the masses in this great fight, the British Government was forced to make big concessions. When the struggle is renewed, and on a higher plane, then the Gold Coast will come into its own.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

BOOKS

- Peter the First, by A. Tolstoy. Lawrence & Wishart. 796 pp. 12s. 6d.
 Mozart's Letters: Editor, Eric Blom. Pelican Books. 278 pp. 3s. 6d.
 The Siege, by Arthur Campbell. Allen & Unwin. 212 pp. 12s. 6d.
 Mayakovsky and his Poetry, by Herbert Marshall. Central Books. 196 pp. 12s. 6d.
 The Poverty of Philosophy, by Karl Marx. Lawrence & Wishart. 256 pp. 3s.
 I Speak My Own Piece, by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Masses & Mainstream, New York. 326 pp. \$1.75.
 U.S.A. Today, by Helen and Scott Nearing. Social Science Institute. 245 pp. \$2.25.
 Lenin: A Biography. Lawrence & Wishart. 272 pp. 7s. 6d.
 The Labour Government & British Industry, by A. A. Rogow & P. Shore. Blackwell. 196 pp. 18s.

PAMPHLETS

- The Housing Cuts Explained. L.R.D. Publications Ltd. 16 pp. 6d.
 Twenty Four for Peace: Poems by Tom Malcolm. 32 pp. 1s.
 The Party of Socialism, by John Mahon. 16 pp. 3d.
 The Communist Party and the Labour Party, by Harry Pollitt. 12 pp. 3d.
 The Future for Miners, by Les Ellis. 16 pp. 3d.
 Time for More in the Pay Packet, by Sam Henderson. 16 pp. 3d.
 Rents Must Not Go Up, by Malcolm MacEwen. 12 pp. 3d.
 Our Aim is Socialism. 24 pp. 6d.
 The Role of the Communist Party. 20 pp. 6d.
 Win the Local Councils. 24 pp. 6d.
- } The Communist Party.