

WEST AFRICAN UNITY

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MONROVIA, capital of the Republic of Liberia, served as the setting during July of last year for the first meeting of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and William Tubman, the governmental heads of Ghana, Guinea and Liberia. The meeting was a sign of the great acceleration in the steady change of Africa; for, since the accession of the Gold Coast to independence in May 1957 under the name of Ghana, the historic evolution of the Continent has altered its rhythm. On the morrow of the Second World War, the only independent States in Africa were Egypt, Liberia, Ethiopia and the Union of South Africa. Today there are six more: Libya, the formerly Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana and Guinea. In 1960, Togoland, Cameroun, Sierra-Leone, the formerly Italian Somaliland, and Nigeria—the largest and most populous of the territories still under British rule—will achieve their independence. The Constitution of the 5th French Republic makes—in Article 86—provision for the right to independence.

Pan-Africanism is clearly on the march. The formation of



the French Community, the two Accra Conferences, the Leopoldville riots, the creation of the Mali Federation and the Ghana-Guinea Union are each a step on the road towards the materialisation of the Pan-African ideal. Whether or not it is likely to be consummated in our time, Pan-Africanism is nevertheless one of the most powerful forces at work in the second half of our century. And the meeting of the three African statesmen, unthinkable less than three years ago, proves clearly that African unity has become a positive reality. Yet the difficulties encountered at the meeting show too that, in spite of the will to transcend national barriers, there remain significant obstacles in the way of the ideal.

It was on September 23, 1958, that M. Sékou Touré and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah decided to unite Guinea and Ghana and in this way form the nucleus of a United States of Africa. Reciprocal technical and administrative aid was promised; and Ghana made £10,000,000 available to Guinea for essential development. Coming as it did at the time of discussions on the European Common Market and the Free Exchange Zone, the union was seen in France as a manipulation of the British Foreign and Colonial Offices; it is believed that no such union would have taken place had the tension then existing between Guinea and France not forced M. Touré to turn eastwards.

Be that as it may, the Ghana-Guinea Union exists so far only in theory. No legal document has as yet given it concrete form; and there exist many factors which may yet prevent the realisation of a real and complete fusion of the two States. The journey of Dr. Nkrumah to Guinea in May, 1959, has achieved no positive results beyond a communiqué inviting the leaders of other African States to join their efforts to those of Accra and Conakry. The very fact that Ghana and Guinea remain in their respective monetary zones must compromise the efficacy and efficiency of the Union. Perhaps the real explanation of the Union's inadequacy lies in the lack of understanding between French- and English-speaking Africans. The considerable differences between the British and French colonial systems seem to have resulted in the creation of two West Africas which remain fundamentally foreign to one another; though how fundamentally, history must decide.

Four months after the proclamation of the Ghana-Guinea Union, 44 representatives of Senegal, Dahomey, Sudan and Haute-Volta met at Dakar and decided—on 17th January, 1959

—to regroup these four republics into a Mali Federation. The presidency of the Federal Assembly was entrusted to M. Mobido Keita. The 62 articles of the constitution—voted unanimously and by acclamation—stipulated Dakar as the capital, French as the official language, and Dahomey, Senegal, the Sudanese and Voltaic Republics as the four member States. The Federal institutions were to be three in number: the Executive was placed in the hands of the Federal President, who chooses his Ministers, two from each member State. The legislative power was vested in a Federal Legislative Assembly, elected for five years and made up of 12 delegates from each of the member States nominated by their respective legislative assemblies. Any West African State was made able to join the Federation at any time, provided it was a republic and respected the separation of powers.

The Mali Federation, as it was then conceived, was an important African entity. But, both economically and demographically, the dominance of the Senegal-Sudan axis was crushing. Moreover, Dahomey and Haute-Volta were not only "poor" partners, but reluctant ones. For Haute-Volta is greatly dependent economically on the Ivory Coast, while Dahomey is traditionally more closely linked with Lagos or Niamey. This explains why ratification of the new constitution met with great difficulties at Ouagadougou and Porto-Novo. The referendum organized in March, 1959, in the Haute-Volta Republic was a defeat for the federalists; and the Dahomey leaders, since the decision of the French government to build a harbour at Cotonou, have grown more antagonistic to the Mali Federation. Both republics have passed from the camp of M. Senghor to that of M. Houphouët-Boigny; they are no longer looking towards Dakar, but towards the Ivory Coast.

After the conference at Dakar on March 25, 1959, at which the *Parti de la Fédération Africaine* was born, a new Mali Union was formed, uniting Senegal and Sudan into a Federal State within the French Community. The Presidency of the Government has been entrusted to M. Mobido Keita, and the Presidency of the Assembly to M. Léopold Sédar Senghor. By limiting, for the moment, its territorial ambitions to Senegal and Sudan, this new Mali Federation has gained both in economic balance and in cohesion; though differences of opinion exist between the various leaders of the P.F.A., Dakar being less intransigent in its attitude to France than Bamako.

Since the proclamation of the Mali Federation, a further territorial regrouping—that of Senegambia—has become likely. The 270,000 inhabitants of Gambia belong to the same ethnic grouping as the Senegalese, and historically the countries have close links. In December, 1958, M. Mamadou Dia, head of the Senegalese government, went to Bathurst to propose the creation of a customs union, the use of the Gambia river for the transit of Senegalese goods, technical and financial co-operation within the framework of a common organization, the fixing of the groundnut price for both countries, and cultural exchanges. It cannot be long before the British possession and the formerly French one are linked together.

In April, 1959, Paris learnt that the governments of the Ivory Coast and the Voltaic Republic had signed an agreement in reply to the new Mali Federation. Dominated by M. Houphouët-Boigny's allegiance to the French Community, the agreement was politically more flexible and much less basic. The harbour of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast became a common establishment, administered by a board on which both republics are represented. The Abidjan-Niger railway was to be used communally by both countries, and road transportation was to be co-ordinated. The communal exploitation of postal services was to be studied, and a complete customs union was instituted, with provision for an equitable distribution of the duties and taxes received. A *Conseil de l'Entente* was to regulate all affairs concerning both governments, and an inter-State Convention would create the "Fonds de Solidarité" provided for in the constitution of the Ivory Coast. Finally, a common Court of Appeal would sit in Abidjan until the Haute-Volta could acquire its own.

Although the Niamey-Abidjan economic axis seems less solid than the Ouagadougou-Abidjan one—mainly because it is longer—a formal agreement was signed soon afterwards by Niger, the Ivory Coast and the Haute-Volta. Dahomey in its turn, after the fall of the Apithy government, gave its consent; and the Sahel-Bénin Union or the United States of the *Conseil de l'Entente* was born.

Finally one must mention the *Etats Associés Africains* launched last February by President Tubman, a "friendly Convention" regulating navigation and commerce among African States already—or soon to be—-independent. Sufficiently flexible to allow each of the signatories to retain its national sovereignty and identity, the Convention rejects any idea of political uni-

fication and is regarded with grave doubts by the orthodox Pan-Africanists, who see in it an American manoeuvre to substitute for a United States of Africa a flexible association more acceptable to the European powers.

Yet, despite the enormous advances in Pan-Africanism in so short a time, serious obstacles remain in the path of the ideal. The newly independent African States are jealous of their hard-won national sovereignty and reluctant to surrender any part of it. It is for this reason that the leaders of Mauritania keep their distance from other black African States; and that Nigeria, soon to be independent, shows no signs of wanting to delegate some of its powers to Ghana in any immediate West African Federation.

Within the States themselves, unity must first be accomplished. Togo and Dahomey are sharply divided into a North and a South; and in Guinea, the Christianised Soussous of the coastal zone keep strictly apart from the Islamised peoples of Fouta-Djallon. In Ghana, the better-developed coastal strip lives in uneasy partnership with the neighbouring Ashantis and Togoland, and more uneasily still with the underdeveloped and politically retarded "Northern Territories". In Nigeria, the Hausas of the North, with their Moslem Emirs, fear the hegemony of the "Men of the South"; while the Baileke of Southern Cameroun revealed their particularism in the elections of January, 1958.

Much of the disunity results, of course, from the collision of entrenched chiefly privileges with the establishment of universal suffrage. Dr. Nkrumah's principal difficulties have been with the Chief of the Ashanti; in Haute-Volta, those elements most hostile to the Mali Federation are found mainly in the entourage of Moro-Naba, who reigns over 1,700,000 subjects living around Ouagadougou; while the Ivory Coast authorities face a demand by the king of Assinia, H.M. Amon Ndofo III, to rule independently over his tiny kingdom of 8,000 kms. and 45,000 subjects. The king and his councillors are now in Abidjan prison awaiting judgment on the charge of having "threatened the security of the State". In Guinea too, the very first move of M. Sékou Touré has been to suppress the chieftainships and strip all political power from the chiefs of Fouta-Djallon. M. Ahidjo, however, promulgating on January 1, 1959, the new Statute of Cameroun, inserted a clause entrenching the rights of the chiefs; and the Nigerian authorities have created a Chamber of Traditional Chiefs.

The clash of political personalities also plays a part. The division of French Africa into two political clans is something more than a quarrel between "federalists" and "anti-federalists"; it is the result of the rivalry between Dakar and Abidjan, or more exactly between M. Senghor and M. Houphouët-Boigny, for the political leadership of French West Africa. In British Africa, this struggle for leadership is focussed in the conflict between Dr. Nkrumah and Mr. Azikiwe, and, within Nigeria itself, in the rivalry for leadership of the State by Mr. Azikiwe, Mr. Awolowo and the Sadurna of Sokoto. Those who would over-emphasize the significance of such collisions, however, must have been amazed by the visit of Dr. Nkrumah to Nigeria in February last year. Pan-Africanism is a living force throughout West Africa; though personal rivalry must tend to weaken it, and nobody can predict how the principal actors in any West African Confederation—Dr. Nkrumah, M. Touré, Mr. Tubman, Mr. Awolowo, M. Senghor, M. Dia, M. Houphouët-Boigny and M. Mobido Keita—will submit to making one of their number the star.

Linguistic obstacles cannot be ignored. Knowledge of both French and English is extremely rare in West Africa; and, for the immediate future, the unity of French- and English-speaking communities, as in the proposed merger of the British and French Camerouns, is likely to encounter severe practical difficulties in administration.

Economic obstacles are most significant; and a United States of Africa will doubtless create a number of problems of economic competition, both in the fields of production and investment. The difference in economic prosperity between Ghana and Guinea, for example, is likely to put Guinea under the economic tutelage of Accra. For Ghana is today the world's first producer of cocoa, the third of industrial diamonds, and the fifth of manganese. It has, moreover, a population twice that of Guinea's, a reserve fund of £200,000,000, important bauxite deposits and an export trade ten times that of its partner. In the field of African investments, difficult but inevitable choices will have to be made; and it will not be easy to decide which project should be given priority over another. In the field of the electro-metallurgy of aluminium alone, four projects are in competition: the 'Volta River Authority' in Ghana, the 'Konkouré' in Guinea, the 'Kouilou' in the French Congo, and the 'Inga' in the Belgian Congo.

The young African States, weighted down by heavy underdevelopment, are reluctant to add to their burdens. Some of them request financial aid from France while rather shamelessly refusing to link their fate with that of their less prosperous neighbours. The Ivory Coast, thanks to its coffee and tobacco exports, has an annual foreign currency surplus of 16 milliard francs; yet the middle classes, mainly African small-holders, who govern at Abidjan refuse to share these profits with the members of a federation the very functioning of which may yet strike them as too onerous. Neither Lagos nor Ibadan wishes a compromise of its existing prosperity by the integration of its local economy into a larger unit; and this doubtless accounts for the lukewarm attitude of Nigerians towards West African unity.

Over and above the purely African obstacles to be overcome, there is the influence of the great powers and more particularly that of France and Britain, each of which countries attempts, in its own interests, to regroup the African units around itself. Great Britain, faithful to its fifteen year old policy of 'leaving in order to stay', tries to establish African federations; while France, which has always rejected indirect rule and still possesses a vague nostalgia for assimilation, dreams of a federal republic 'from the Rhine to the Congo'.

The British colonial system has often—not unreasonably—been compared with that of Carthage, the French with that of Rome. The British always placed their commercial interests above any humanitarian responsibilities, discouraging the economic and social development of their colonized peoples where such was not to their clear economic benefit. If they practised indirect rule, it was mainly to avoid the high cost of administration and concentrate on high investment returns. Yet not only was the British government the first to grant independence to a colonial territory; but, having once agreed to independence for the Gold Coast, it released Dr. Nkrumah from jail to offer him the premiership. And by subordinating Nigerian independence to the retention of those federal links which Britain herself had created, it successfully prevented the balkanisation of the huge territory. By playing off local rivalries the British government could have split the country up into three or four separate and competing units; but by having full confidence in its African élite, it worked for its own interests leaving intact one of the greatest economic and political units of Africa and assuring Britain's own economic future. Recog

nizing the intensity and potential of Pan-Africanism, the British have joined—and so strengthened—the current. The policy is already paying dividends. Since Ghana achieved independence, its white population has doubled; and the Governor-General at Accra has more effective authority than the High Commissioner of the French Republic at Lomé, while at the same time being less severely criticised by the people he administers.

The legalistic turn of the French mind, accentuated by the brains' trust of lawyers who govern the 5th Republic in ignorance of African realities, has formulated the concept of the *Communauté*. Faithful to the assimilationist idea, France wants Paris—and not Dakar or Abidjan or Tananarive—to be the centre of the Community. To the Pan-African ideal she replies with the ideal of Eurafrica, a project which has already been strongly condemned by the majority of responsible African leaders. The greater degree of autonomy that the French government has recently given to the territories under its control, the existence of an important French-speaking élite, the increasing economic investment by France and the encouragement she is giving to social development—all this will greatly help the maintenance of the *Présence Française* in Africa. But one factor has roused suspicion against her—that France refused to give *de facto* independence to her former colonial possessions, forcing them to choose between independence and continued membership of the Community. The authors of the 5th Republic have chosen a federal system around France and look askance at any inter-African regrouping; in the minds of many of France's present leaders, the desire for unity in Africa masks territorial or personal ambitions at variance with the interests of France. It is this defensive reflex which explains, at least in part, why the appeal by Mali for an effective regrouping of French West Africa awakened no response in Paris.

It is easy to conclude from this that France favours the balkanisation of Africa, and Britain the unity. But the present French constitution permits any number of political arrangements, from the most rigid federal system to a loose confederacy. The inevitable head-on collision between M. Senghor and M. Houphouët-Boigny has not yet taken place; and there is no reason why French common-sense should not come to terms with Pan-Africanism, and the partisans of a French Commonwealth prevail over the defenders of a strict federal orthodoxy.