

# LEGON OBSERVER

## SUPPLEMENT

### LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

by S. N. Woode

"SUBSECTION (2) of Section 1 of the Local Government Act, 1961 provides that every City Council shall employ a Town Clerk; but as in the case of the Treasurer the Act says very little about the duties of the Town Clerk"<sup>1</sup>.

"The Local Government Act provides for the appointment of a Chairman whose main function is to preside over Council Meetings."<sup>2</sup>

The observations above give rise to interesting reflections on what has to be done to provide leadership in matters of control and direction in the internal organisation of local councils in this country. One needs to read the reports on the affairs of the city councils of Accra-Tema, Kumasi and Sekondi/Takoradi to find out that the absence of strong focal points of leadership in the management of these councils created conditions which made the practice of passing the buck and "irresponsible" administration significant features of the administrations of these councils.

#### Internal Structures

The fundamental statutes that have since 1951 governed the basic internal structure of local councils in this country provided that councils be made up of elected councillors who collectively dealt with broad matters of policy and controlled the purse strings of the councils. The councillors of a particular council elected one of their number to act as chairman of the council for one year, and, as the quotation above indicates, he presided over the meetings of the council. All councils were required by law to operate through committees which helped the councils discharge their responsibilities. Some of these committees — Finance and Staff, Education and Development — were statutory; that is, the law provided that they must be established. Other committees were permissive in the sense that if a council thought them necessary, it could appoint certain committees to manage and regulate some of its responsibilities. In the nature of things, statutory committees tended

to be standing and permanent features of the internal organisation of local councils. The permissive committees could either be standing or *ad hoc*, depending on the nature of the work for which a particular committee was established, and the time it took to accomplish the work in hand.

The law was silent on what departments were to be set up within a council. It merely stated that certain officers, a Town Clerk, a Treasurer, a Town/City Engineer and a Medical Officer of Health had to be appointed. In the internal arrangements of things we find that, (and this was especially true of the City and Municipal organisations which had the money to employ these officers), each of these officers headed a department, the responsibilities of which were consistent with their respective professional qualifications and experiences. Thus a Treasurer (who had to be an accountant) was the head of the Treasury Department; the City Engineer headed the City Engineer's Department; and the Medical Officer of Health ran the show in the Health Department. These chief officers were individually responsible to the council for discharging the responsibilities of the council. Thus, for example, the Medical Officer of Health was responsible for carrying out the health and sanitary functions of the council.

#### Departmental Organisations

In carrying out his responsibilities no head of department came under the direction and control of any individual councillor or officer. That is, there was neither an elected executive nor a chief executive officer to control, supervise and give a sense of direction to the activities of the individual departments. What we found in practice was that the departmental organisation of the council corresponded with the lay-out of the committees; and each department worked and lived with a corresponding committee. For instance, the Medical Officer of Health worked with the Public Health Committee and the City

Engineer's Department worked with the Works and Development Committee.

One hesitates to come up with a chart that shows the sources and flow of matters that come up to council for direction. We can, for the sake of simplicity, isolate the four areas of central government, councillors, the officers of the council and the public. When matters came up for decision, it was expected that the full council would realise its ineffectiveness to handle all classes of business and refer the case to its particular specialized committee to study and report back to the council. These committees, it is argued, have the advantage of smallness and members interested enough in the work of their respective committees to have the eyes for detail and the presence of professionals to offer expert advice. Having sorted out the issues involved in the case in hand, the committee reported back to the council for its final decision. The decision was transmitted to the department concerned for executive action to be taken under the supervision and direction of a corresponding committee.

### Representation of Various Groups

This *modus operandi*, it is claimed, serves many useful purposes. It is argued that the full council of members are ill-equipped to handle the mass of detail that most businesses throw up; and that a small body of interested representatives will have the time and forbearance to go through any mass of detail and present the council with the issues in a clear-cut fashion. In the process of sorting issues out the committee system of local government allows, it is again argued, interests of a wider variety of people to be represented; and furthermore provides a considerable number of people the chance for administrative and political education. Finally, it is argued, that this style of local government ensures that executive action taken by local executives in local areas will be subjected to popular control.

These are worthwhile advantages to engage the interest of all who feel committed to democratic habits; for they indicate the political role of local government in the entire political system of the country. But then local government does not and cannot exist merely as a school for training in politics and in the art of governing oneself. Citizens pay taxes and rates in anticipation of hygienic public latrines, well-equipped schools and long-lasting feeder roads and generally

efficient and effective administration. It is not the case that the committee system of local government fails to deliver the goods; it is a suggestion that some other style of administration might yield more human happiness from the rates and taxes we pay to our local councils.

The English who have been using the committee system of local government since the 19th century and from whom we copied this style of administration, have realized "that the association of each service with a committee and of a department and chief officer with both produces a loose confederation of disparate authorities."<sup>3</sup> It is from this situation that flow all the sins of bad management, passing the buck, self-importance and self-containment and the difficulties of achieving co-ordinated administration. Thus while "all over the city (Accra-Tema) we (saw) the ugly spectacle of over flowing refuse dumps and latrines",<sup>4</sup> there was indecision as to who was to take effective action to obtain import licences to enable the city government to order spare parts for the repair of the city's conservancy vehicles. Was it the duty of the Medical Officer of Health whose department has the responsibility of discharging the statutory health and sanitary functions of the council or the Town Clerk whom the Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the Accra-Tema City Council chose to regard as the "Chief Administrator" to take the necessary action to get the vehicles on the road and on the job? And where does the Fleet Maintenance Engineer's Department come in in a case of this nature?

### Denying Privileges to Comment

We deny ourselves the privilege to comment on the conclusions of the Commission on this matter. What can be said, though, is that the committee system of local government that we copied from the English did not allow the Town Clerk to be recognized and accepted as the executive head of the council's paid officers in the sense of having authority over the heads of the department of the council. Nor did it allow the heads of departments to be responsible to the council through the Town Clerk. The success of the Town Clerk in achieving co-ordinated administration might be due to his position as the clerk to the council and all its committees, which work involves preparing agenda for meetings and reading and interpreting correspondence. In this position, if the Town Clerk is sharp, he acquires total knowledge of the work of the

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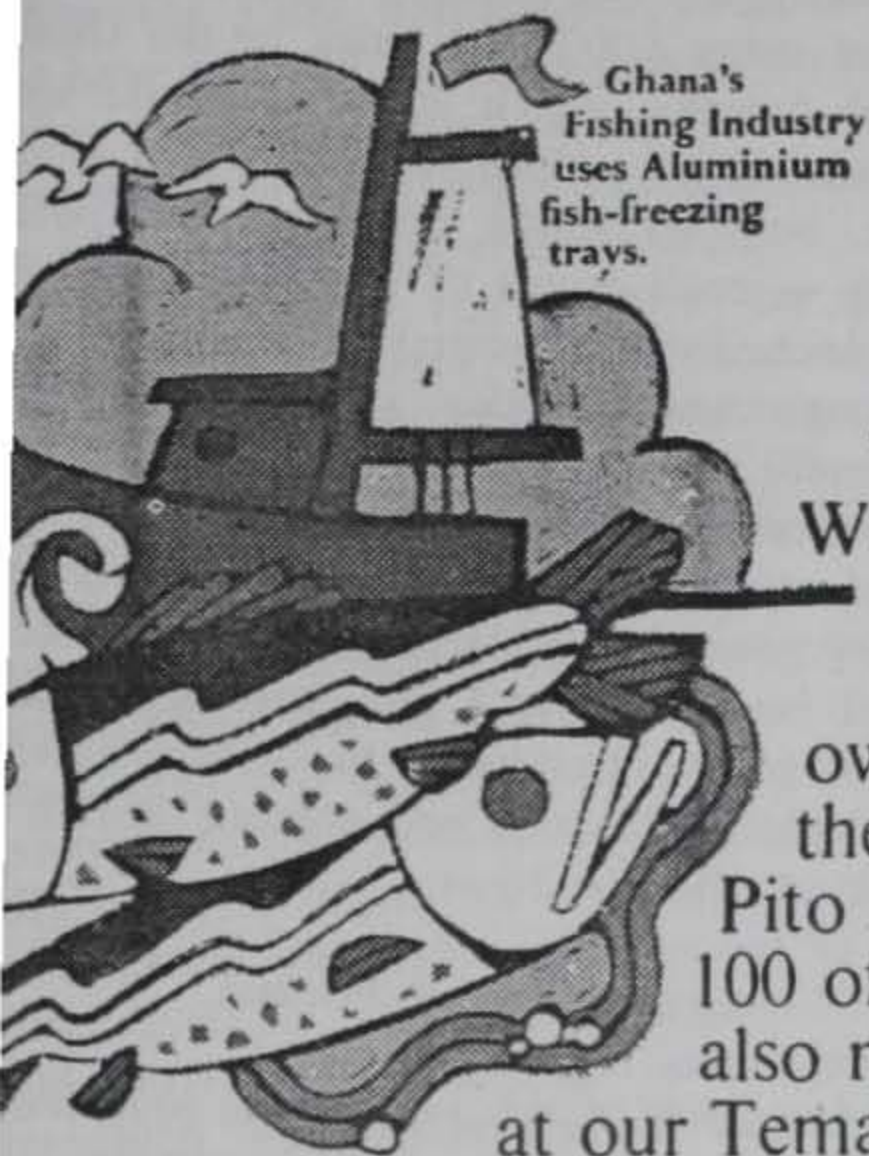


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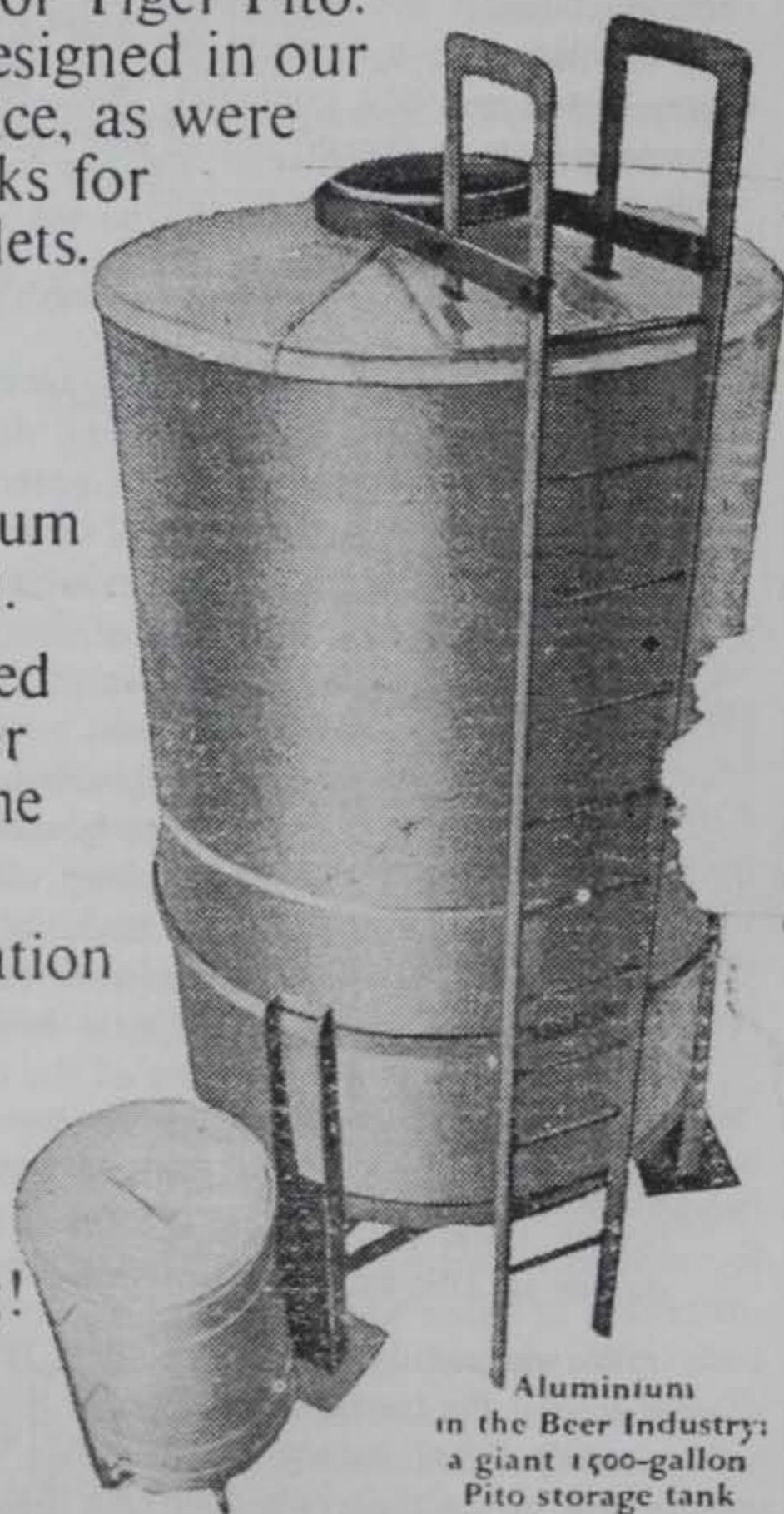
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council — which is power. But even this power is useless if he does not have the requisite professional and managerial skills to get things done.

The absence of a recognized chief executive (i) to provide effective and efficient administration (ii) to ensure that heads of departments worked as a team; and (iii) to ensure effective control systems must have been clear to the C.P.P. administration. For, an amendment to the Local Government Act of 1961 in 1964 provided that the Accra-Tema City Council be equipped with an Executive Chairman as the official head of the council to perform certain functions of the council. The executive chairman of the Accra-Tema City Council was appointed by the Head of the C.P.P. government. By 1966 almost all chairmen, strong in the knowledge that they were party stalwarts and encouraged by the payment of regular salaries to them (true of chairmen of municipal and city councils), had taken permanent seats in council offices and were directing affairs as "executive chairmen".

#### **'Feelings of Political Leadership'**

The movement towards having executive chairmen was certainly an interesting development which matter (I dare say) still generates fierce emotions when mentioned. One argues one way or the other depending of course, is on one's party political inclinations. The crux of the matter was that "the feeling at the time was that the council (Accra-Tema) needed political leadership,"<sup>5</sup> which can be a legitimate proposition because in a committee system of local government it is possible to have a council lacking effective political leadership due to the mode of electing a chairman for a year and the role cast for him. When such a situation presents itself, life can be miserable for the servants of the council who have to put up with constant interference in their work from individual councillors and local politicians. Clearly this is a condition hardly conducive to efficient and consistent administration.

We do not deny that in public administration there is the need for political leadership. We need political direction to bring the common touch to the slide rule solutions that experts will offer. In deciding where to build public latrines and locate streets, feeder roads and schools, the opinion and interests of the public are just as weighty as, if not more than, the calculations of the technicians. And a properly organised political leadership ensures that the elements of the commonplace are brought to bear on tech-

nical decisions, in ordering priorities and in setting the tone for executives to take the cue.

Having said this for the need for political leadership in our local councils, what can be said on who exercises administrative leadership? Here the experiences of other countries can be instructive. And what we find the most engaging proposition is the city-manager style of administration of some 2,000 odd cities in the United States of America, which is based on the idea that municipal government can be run just like business, built on sound financing with policy made by a small group of (on the average 9) elected councillors (directors). The idea of the city-manager was hit upon at the beginning of this century when honest and hard-working citizens of certain cities in America got sick and tired of corrupt politicians who were running their city governments. Feeling the consequences of inept financial control and poor administration, they sought to replace the politicians with highly trained, dedicated and efficient officials in the field of administration.

#### **Laymen And Politicians**

In a few words, in this type of city government, there is a small council which determines policies, passes byelaws, adopts the budget and appoints a professionally competent manager to get on with the job for as long as he behaves. The manager appoints and dismisses the heads of departments; he is responsible for what goes on in all the departments with power to decide on the size and organisational structure of departments, the grading of positions and the qualifications of appointees. He advises the council on its financial condition and needs, prepares, submits and administers the budget of the council. He combines in himself, clearly, the functions of our Treasurer and what our Town Clerk timidly does. His assigned role is similar to that of a general manager in a business organisation, holding regular meetings with departmental heads and giving decisions much more readily than our committees of laymen and politicians.

Thus if we had a recognized and a professionally competent chief executive in our local councils, the responsibility of which officer it was to have taken a positive decision in getting spare parts to help repair the conservancy fleets of Accra-Tema would not have been in doubt. The chief executive only needed to have had a meeting with the Medical Officer of Health, the Fleet

aintenance Engineer and the Treasurer to have ascertained the facts and taken action. Such a meeting would also have given each of these chief officers the opportunity to have gained a total picture of the needs of the administration as far as the sanitary problems of the city was concerned. That is, all would have learnt from the Medical Officer of Health the consequences of not having enough vehicles to help dispose of refuse; the Fleet Maintenance Engineer would have apprised his colleagues on the need for having spare parts always in stock; and the Treasurer would have put in the necessary words about the financial condition of the council.

The plan of the city-manager may have its merits. Indeed it may be considered alien; and the suggestion is not that it should be adopted in this country root and branch. The greatest criticism of the plan is that conceived as it was in the spirit of business enterprise, it rides roughshod over the political aspects of local government. But do the lessons of the fifteen years (1951-66) experiment in democratic local government—as particularly highlighted in the city administrations of Accra-Tema, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi—not lead one to think of other systems of internal organisation which will introduce professional administration and integrated management in our local councils?

### What's the Real Answer?

The answer may not necessarily be the city-manager plan. Perhaps our legislators will come up with a solution that can be said to be Ghana's original invention in the field of public administration. But whatever the system may be, it must ensure that the authority of the whole administration in a local authority is conceived as one and, not as in the past, a number of separate departments. It must allow that one person is placed in a firm position to have a total picture of the conditions and needs of the administration and get the whole machinery moving as an integrated whole.

However, it does not seem that the provisions of the Local Administration Bill, 1970, create the conditions for the authority of the whole administration of the suggested District Councils to be felt. The District Councils are described in the Bill as the fundamental units of local administration responsible both for "carrying out the ordinary functions of local authorities" and for the "promotion of development plans for their areas, the supervision and direction in their areas of the work of decentralized Ministries and departments, and the management of cer-

tain essential services".<sup>6</sup> The District Council will be at once the unit for providing local government services and the unit for administering the decentralized services of the central government.

This arrangement is quite an innovation in the public administration of this country, though the integrated type of field administration the Bill seeks to provide operates in France and in some other European countries.

The responsibilities placed on these District Councils will not only call for the type of representatives who will be fully informed on all major issues facing the council, they will also call for an ordered system of internal management which will help the councils achieve the effectiveness no doubt expected of them by the Progress Party government which might want to use the councils as instruments of development in the country. However, the silence of the Bill on who will offer leadership in directing and controlling the affairs of these councils leaves one to speculate as to whether the old pattern of internal arrangements with its many committees and subcommittees and its concomitant need for an elaborate machinery of co-ordination is going to be a feature of the new councils.

### Taking Discretionary Powers

There is the mention of the chairman of the council who like other councillors will be an elected member of the council but owe his position as chairman to an appointment by the Prime Minister. But as in the basic laws of local government of the 1950s and 1960s present Bill on Local Administration is quiet on the powers of the chairman as an executive head of the Council.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the ministerial instrument which appoints the chairman of the District Council will take the discretionary powers of defining clearly what the nature of his functions will be.

However, if there are some people who, because of their experiences of the Executive Chairman of Accra-Tema City Council, object to executive control over District Councils of the 1970s being placed in the hands of politicians by a Head of Government, then the next class of persons in line for leadership of the Councils will be the District Administrative Officers. But here again we find that the District Administrative Officer is in a weak position to offer effective leadership in administrative matters. The Local Administration Bill, 1970, sees him as the council's secretary performing functions assigned to him by the council.<sup>8</sup> If we examine the pro-

visions of the Bill on regional management, we find that in that case the relations between the Regional Administrative Officer and the Regional Chief Executive on the one hand, and those between the Regional Administrative Officer and the officials of the regional administration on the other have been clearly defined. The relation between the Regional Chief Executive and the Regional Administrative Officer, we are told, will be similar to that of a Principal Secretary and his Minister. That is having advised the Regional Chief Executive, the Regional Administrative Officer is held responsible for getting on with the job of administration in the region.

The provisions of the Bill do not say much the same things for the District Administrative Officer though the explanation to the Bill indicates that he, like the Regional Administrative Officer, will be the head of the staff of the District Authority. But it is not clear reading from the Bill what the relations will be between the District Administrative Officer and the Chairman the nature of whose functions are not yet clear. The apparent silence of the Bill on the sort of relations that would exist between the District Administrative Officer and the Chairman tempts one to suggest a principle that should be followed in assigning responsibilities between the Chairman and the District Administrative Officer. Here we suggest that, as is the case with many major business organisations, arrangements be devised in such a way that the District Administrative Officer lives at the apex of a triangle supporting and balancing the council. That is, the appointed chairman should be limited to offering the necessary political leadership on broad policy decisions which the District Council must take in each of its fields of responsibilities and determine the ends to be achieved. The District Administrative Officer, as a general manager, should be left free to organise the means to achieve the ends established by the council.

### The Spirit of the Bills

This mode of operation, we contend, does not conflict with the spirit of the Bill which emphasises more of the "administration" than the "government" of localities. And if we are right in assuming that the end the Bill seeks to achieve is effective and efficient administration of central and local government services in local areas, then a professionally competent administrator must be allowed to offer leadership in matters of management. By limiting the Chairman to political leadership and the professional administrator to administrative leadership we

seek to make the authority relationships of the whole administration of the council clear to the government, the officers and the public. We again, seek to enable the District Administrative Officer and the other senior officers of the council to get on with the job of administration with the minimum of interference beyond the policy-making stage from the councillors and the chairman of a District Council. Above all, we want to ensure that the district authorities operate as similarly as possible as major business organisations do—a necessary requirement for positive and dynamic contribution towards solving the problems of development in this country.

### FOOTNOTES

1. *Interim and Final Reports of the Commission of Enquiry into the Accra-Tema City Council*, Accra, 1969 p.44, para. 144.
2. *Ibid.*, p.44, para. 147.
3. D. N. Chester, "Local Democracy and the Internal Organisation of Local Authorities" in *Public Administration*, Autumn, 1968, Vol. 46, p.287. Chester is here summarising the observations of the Maud Committee on Management of Local Government.
4. *Interim and Final Reports of the Commission of Enquiry into the Accra-Tema City Council*, Accra, 1969, p.8 para. 36.
5. *Ibid.*, p.45, para. 149.
6. *Local Administration Bill*, Accra, 1970 (Nov. 23rd) pi. para. 4.
7. Contrast the position of the Chairman of the District Council with that of the Chairman of the Regional Council who also owes his appointment to the Prime Minister; but is called the Regional Chief Executive in order "to emphasise the character of his functions."  
*Ibid.*, pii. para. 10.
8. *Ibid.*, pii. para. 9(2).

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polise the loyalty of their people. Thus *all members of the leadership elite become wedded to the ideal of undivided loyalty to a single cause*:

- (b) but a section of the revolutionary elite get fixated in a second attitude of mind, that of being *anti-government by development*, i.e., through the experience of having fought to change "the fundamental character of a country rather than accepting well-established rules of political life and working within them". What becomes the nationalist take-over government is thus *loyalty-orientated*, so to speak, while an oppositional segment breaks away and sets itself up in a new, *anti-government*, stance;
- (c) the conflict thus engendered between two emerging forces is inevitable, but to the successor-government group it all seems illegitimate and treacherous on the part of the oppositional elements. (Apter puts this position almost the other way: that in the new nations it is the opposition leaders—or many of them—that "regard the new government much as they did their colonial predecessors, i.e., as basically illegitimate" (*op.cit.*, p.56), a generalisation completely unacceptable to me);
- (d) the new leaders are faced at independence with the whole range of political, social, and economic problems known to human societies, and to them the need to tackle these is immediate, not futuristic;
- (e) from those leaders of the freedom-fight who press most to the bitter end, politics have become the permanent occupation and the breadwinner. Pre-occupation with a role in opposition appears to them like intolerable flirtation with non-realities in political and economic life, a luxury suited only to "wealthy countries where political life is less stern and the future more secure". (*Op. cit.*, p.57);
- (f) in addition to all <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~, the urge is overpowering to "catch up" with the advanced nations; to demonstrate ability long submerged under the dominant (former) colonial regime; to aim for quick results as a means of "proof"—all of which aims and urges are incompatible with democratic competition, debate, choice, and the rest of the time-wasting gestures of democratic procedure.

Some objective facts which give number of the above partly subject of the radical African leaders are (a) the new regimes are without adequate of skilled manpower for the operation of modern state machinery; (b) they are lacking out a managerial class trained in the operation and techniques of large-scale industry or mercantile business; and (c) they have no capital for development and no credit except on a basis almost of charity. Martin Kilson (in "The Politics of African Socialism", *African Forum*, Vol. I, No. 3, Winter 1965) has written pointedly about "this lack of preparedness", this poor representation, among the new African elites, of "many important modernizing attributes"; this lack of training and experience "in running large-scale industrial, commercial, and financial institutions" and "in such technological and scientific fields as agronomy, engineering, and metallurgy, all of which are required for modern economic development". (*Op. cit.*, p.17)

#### Various Forms of Ideologies

✓ Thus psychological pressures as well as material realities underlie the case against political opposition (in the form of another organised party), as made out by the one-party statist. The reasons which lead the Nkrumahs, Sekou Toures, Nyereres, Houphouët Boignys, et al., to the exclusivist positions they take on this matter cannot, therefore, be frivolous ones. Not only that. The *Nkrumahs*, *Sekou Toures* and *Nyereres* have their foundations in, or are moored to, Marxist-Leninist ideologies and dialectic, or at least to various forms and/or degrees of socialism—pure, adulterated, bastardised; classical, African, confused etcetera. The *Houphouët-Boignys* and *Bandas*, on the other hand, are in the one-party game for less intellectual-revolutionary ideology and more home-spun, pragmatic reasons. But all the different schools of one-party thought and action do have their reasons, and, to repeat, these cannot be frivolous ones.

But they may be false, or misapprehended, or even weak. Take a simple one namely, the claim that traditional African society had its answer to the reality of conflict in the resolution of a problem within the council of elders, with the chief summing up and formulating the consensus, this being then accepted as the general will, until superseded by the decisions arising out of another and later deliberation on the same class of problems. A University of Ghana lecturer in

He has pointed out that this is a document which cannot bear close examination. The process of harmonisation of conflicting interests or opinions within the framework of a traditional community is a relatively simple one wholly sufficient for a simple society with simple needs. Traditional societies which progressed beyond "primitive" needs and blood-based relationships would find their procedures and solutions no longer adequate. Nyerere may be in the process of forcing some progress into, or out of, this traditional paradigm; we have to wait and hope. But in its usual form the argument certainly lacks reality.

### Conflicts in Society

This is principally because developments in human society involve two parallel yet radically different processes which affect "government" decisively. First, Man increases his *number* by *addition*, but, secondly, his relations with other men by *multiplication*; or, put into slightly different terms: people increase in number by arithmetical progression, but their relations with one another multiply by geometric progression. A single individual becomes 2, then 3, 4, 5, etc., or 10, 20, 30, 40, etc.; but the relations between or among individuals, developing upon the needs, wants, feelings (of love, hate, rivalry, jealousy, anger, admiration, etc.), as well as the goods and services, etc., of each individual in relation to every other individual—these increase in series like 2, 4, 16, 32, 1024, etc. (or 3, 9, 27, 629, etc.), i.e., where the interests, drives, ambitions, rivalries, and conflicts in society proliferate endlessly. Moreover, the higher the rate of material progress, the higher the rate of increase in the number of "relationships" among people.

When man gets to this point the simple resolutions of traditional society become, to the complex demands of his new order, as the Dane gun to modern artillery . . . . Precisely at this point, therefore, it becomes absurd to claim for the single-body caucus the power to harmonise such large numbers of heterogeneous elements without political rupturing from the persistence of dissident groups. Other arguments against the one-party statist position are also available. For instance, if this is the nature or pattern of relationships, then the only way to create a controllable situation among the dissidents would seem to be to give to them, too, the right to organise their discontent into something respectable, responsible, and responsive to rationality. Otherwise one

alternative at least could be *disorder arising out of unmitigated discontent*. In addition, the Marxist resolution has its own problems, to say the least of it.

It may here be pointed out, in passing, that the "deficiency theory" supporting one-party ideology and as analysed by the Apter and the Kilsons, though powerfully attractive is not all that self-sufficient a rationale either. In his chapter entitled "The Role of Adult Education in Orientating a Rational Tradition in Africa for Economic and Social Development", on page 264 of the book *Mass Education: Studies in Adult Education* . . . . (Edstroem, Erdos and Prosser, editors), a contemporary, J. Opare-Abetia, puts it this way:

One such theory is the deficiency theory, which states that lack of resources such as power, capital, suitable climate, skilled manpower and managerial ability has been the cause of stagnation in Africa. But when one examines what Africa has done with the resources in which it has the greatest economic advantage, and the outcome of independence in many African countries, it is difficult to accept this explanation. It would be difficult to find any country in the world which has attained a high level of economic development because it possessed at the earliest stages of its economic development all the ingredients considered prerequisite for economic breakthrough in Africa. History teaches us that the development was gradual and that it started from very humble beginnings. It was the result of the changed outlook about nature and society which motivated men to utilize their resources to the extent of the existing knowledge at the time. If Africa is to wait until it can have an abundant supply of the material factors of production, without giving its people fundamental lessons in the whys and hows of economic development, very slow and little economic development will be achieved . . . .

But let that pass. I would now like to be the devil's advocate and summarise my own feelings about the one-party phenomenon by two postulates of my own, by which to throw the argument wide open again:

- (a) The persistence of one-partyism in Africa seems to me to argue a validity or a potency not yet discovered or recognized; and disastrous one-party experiments like the ex-C.P.P. regime in Ghana do not suffice to outlaw or