

Kweku Folson

# An African Tragedy

Kwame Nkrumah & Mr. Bing (Q.C.)

*"Old politicians never admit defeat. Geoffrey Bing, ex-M.P. and Nkrumah's Attorney-General, was reluctant last night to accept that the Labour Party executive had killed his parliamentary comeback... No explanation was vouchsafed, but a majority seems to have felt that his link with Nkrumah would be a liability... "I would be interested," he said, "in having it reconsidered. What is it alleged that I've done? What was wrong with Nkrumah's Ghana?..."*

THE GUARDIAN (17 March 1969)

MR. GEOFFREY BING, Q.C., served from 1956 to 1966 as constitutional and political adviser to Kwame Nkrumah and was the Attorney-General of Ghana. Nevertheless, he appears in his autobiographical account of the fateful years<sup>1</sup> to be very anxious to play down his own personal role. He claims that he was no political adviser at all, but only a "technician" (pp. 20-21), and that "throughout I was a civil servant... The civil servant (in Ghana) was confined within narrow limits. The country was run by Dr. Nkrumah, his Cabinet and the various Party and quasi-Party organisations which shared in the government" (pp. 37, 236).

Yet his own account belies his claim. When he was first appointed Constitutional Adviser he was not to advise on constitution matters at all, but on the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the corrupt activities of the Cocoa Purchasing Company, a political instrument of the Convention People's Party (p. 171). Discussing the appointment of an Economic Adviser

to the first C.P.P. government he slips repeatedly into the use of the first person plural: "the type of experts *we* had in mind"; "... Dr. Thomas Balogh whom *we* wanted to assist in the preparatory work..." (pp. 145-6); similarly, on the preparation for the independence constitution: "within a month of Independence *we* would introduce *our* own constitution" (p. 187). Feeling that his energies were restricted as an Attorney-General reforming the laws of Ghana, he resigned to give greater scope to them, to devote them to education and, in particular, to fashioning top institutions which would be "the forcing ground for a fundamentally different approach to the problems of mankind." Having discussed his plans with Nkrumah, the latter suggested (pp. 333-4) that he should take up one of the Presidential Professorships at the University! When, finally, he resigned as Attorney-General he set up his office in Flagstaff House, where Nkrumah lived and worked, and he dealt with "a wide variety of matters" or "a wide range of subjects" among which were: civil service organisation, methods of preventing corruption, international questions at the United Nations and the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, negotiations over cocoa, the "World Without the Bomb" Conference and Ghana's education system (pp. 338-9).

A Cagliostro or a technician?

In any event, Mr. Bing is in the company of those happy few who have a simple ideological clue to Nkrumah's Ghana and an even simpler explanation of the Coup that toppled Nkrumah's régime in February 1966. His account of Nkrumah's Ghana from 1950 to 1956 is typical of views held by many simple-minded ideologists.

According to Mr. Bing, Ghana at independence decided to set an example to the world

<sup>1</sup> *Reap The Whirlwind*, Macgibbon and Kee, 63s.

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by following what he calls "a means of co-existence between the industrialised nations and the poorer states who comprise the great bulk of mankind." Because of this the country, which was economically and strategically of no particular importance, was endowed with great symbolic significance and "every figure who appeared on its stage was magnified and distorted almost beyond recognition." Although "crimes . . . on occasions, occurred"<sup>2</sup> and there were a few local weaknesses, the country was doing very well until the Coup. Great social and economic strides had been made, and the country had "ostentatiously dissociated itself from the world's ideological conflicts." (How anyone who lived in Ghana after 1960 can make, let alone subscribe to, such a statement, defies belief!) Yet Nkrumah's policies were intensely disliked by Western forces and were accordingly criticised and discredited in the Western press.

Partly, according to Bing, this was because "orthodox conservative opinion in the West" wanted to prove that Africans could not govern themselves. They badly needed this proof to provide a moral explanation, even justification, of the slave trade, Western exploitation and colonialism in Africa. Partly, also, the explana-

tion is that what Ghana was doing in those years constituted "a challenge to the Western system powerful enough to compel it to mount a sustained counter-offensive." But Mr. Bing is too enlightened to ascribe this almost unanimous Western hostility to Ghana to any conspiracy.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, according to Mr. Bing, this hostility was due to the fact that every attempt to implement the country's policy ran counter to one or other of those vested interests which inevitably grow up in the train of colonialism and necessarily survive it. It was these hostile forces which finally destroyed Nkrumah's government. As for Nkrumah himself, he knew all the faults of the country and (with the modest help of Mr. Bing) unflinchingly prescribed the correct remedies for them. Unfortunately, no one man or institution in the country could match Nkrumah in his wisdom, hard-working habits, integrity and patriotism and, consequently, he was badly let down. Thus, the Civil Service was useless, trapped as it was in its colonial and Oxbridge strait-jacket. The judiciary was useless—what else could it be when it thought that the archaic laws of England constituted the *Visio Beatifica*? The University (of Ghana) was useless because instead of producing technically qualified people to solve the country's problems it produced only people with degrees in Ancient History, English Literature, or the Classics.<sup>4</sup> And the people of Ghana themselves were stupid—why else did they "quite uncritically" accept the results of the referendum of January, 1964, which were rigged by over-enthusiastic District Commissioners, the Civil Service and the Police, despite the democratic purity of Nkrumah and his party machine? All this is not a caricature of Mr. Bing's arguments. Ghanaian critics of Nkrumah's régime have heard such arguments propounded by Western ideological supporters of Nkrumah again and again.

<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that Mr. Bing does not give any example in his narrative of such crimes.

<sup>3</sup> However, he claims later and at several points in his narrative that such a conspiracy (or several such conspiracies) in fact existed. After granting African countries independence, the Western world "almost immediately repented and stepped in to prevent them governing themselves" (p. 36). Later, he claims that the conspiracy took place even earlier. The British even *before* independence had decided to prepare the country for a phoney independence (pp. 279-81). Later still, he claims that the change of policy did not occur "almost immediately" after independence, but that the developed world cooperated with the African states for some time before changing their policy (p. 450). Consistency is not a virtue of Mr. Bing's book.

<sup>4</sup> This is not only untrue, but silly. The University had by 1961, when the foreign exchange crisis started, produced more graduates in Economics (the particular complaint of Mr. Bing) than in any other discipline apart from History. Only a handful of graduates were trained in Classics and Ancient History. The University of Ghana comes in for a lot of abuse from Mr. Bing; but surprisingly, he keeps silent over the abuses Nkrumah's press used to hurl at Dr. C. C. O'Brien, the Vice-Chancellor, whom Mr. Bing describes as a "man with progressive ideas" (p. 364). The truth is that the University of Ghana refused to kow-tow to the whims and caprices of Nkrumah, Bing, and their accomplices and to be taken in by their fanciful ideas.

IT HAS ALWAYS PUZZLED me, among many Ghanaian critics of Nkrumah, why apparently well-meaning Western left-wing defenders of Nkrumah's régime have closed their eyes to its appalling misdeeds and even crimes. A careful reading of Mr. Bing's book provides the answer. The ideological supporters of Nkrumah's régime are primarily interested not in Ghana, nor even in Nkrumah, but in Western society. They are, for various reasons, against capitalism and capitalists, against big combines and monopolists, against "bourgeois" trade unions and Universities, against Churches, against the American alliance, NATO, the Common Market, in sum, against "the Establishment" and its policies. It is these prejudices and hatreds which

determine what they support and despise in Ghanaian society. What, therefore, predisposes them to support Nkrumah is that he is thought to be against their enemies in the West, not because of his achievements for Ghanaians or Africans. Certainly, this approach to Ghana's problems comes up every now and again in Mr. Bing's narrative. At every turn in the narrative he is over-anxious to attack Western papers and authors, and to defend Nkrumah's record—and his own—against their criticisms. It is not, indeed, an exaggeration to say that that is the whole purpose of his book—and he himself says almost as much. The primary purpose of the book, according to Mr. Bing, is not to defend Nkrumah, his Ministers or his Party, nor even the author himself; his main purpose is to explain "the important lesson in its world context which Ghana provides."

It is important to emphasise this point if Ghanaians, and Africans generally, are to draw the right conclusions from Nkrumah's tragic failure. One very important reason why Nkrumah failed in Ghana, and was alienated not only from the "intellectuals" or the "élite" but, in the last years of his régime, from "the masses" as well, was that he relied too much on foreign political advisers, mostly left-wing dissidents at odds with their own societies. These people never understood Ghana. Mr. Bing pretends to great authority in Ghana, but his interpretation of various aspects of Ghanaian society is frequently faulty and his factual mistakes are legion.

Thus it is simply nonsensical to say that the Aborigines Rights Protection Society were supporters of Indirect Rule (p. 45). It is equally nonsensical to include members of the National Liberation Council among the aristocratic class (p. 62), whatever that means in the Ghanaian

<sup>5</sup> Nkrumah corroborates this statement rather unexpectedly: "It pays no one to tamper with Ghanaian freedom and dignity" (Kwame Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1968, p. 29). Mr. Bing complains of his treatment after the Coup when he was arrested (p. 20). Many Ghanaians thought he was much luckier than the victims of Nkrumah's régime who languished in condemned cells for years until the Coup.

An authoritative study of the operation of the Preventive Detention Act is being made by Professor Adu Boahen and Mr. K. E. de Graft Johnson of the University of Ghana. Meanwhile glimpses of the cruelties perpetrated by the Nkrumah régime may be had from two reports containing extracts from evidence of witnesses at a Commission of Enquiry into Ghana Prisons: *Dr. J. B. Danquah, Detention and Death in Nsawam Prison* and *Mr. E. Obetsebi-Lamptey, Detention and Death in Nsawam Prison*, both published by the Ministry of Information, Accra.

context. Nobody in Ghana has ever believed that the Colonial legacy included "a completely efficient or a completely incorrupt police force" (p. 71). The Cocoa Marketing Board was certainly not an exploitative instrument foisted on the farmers by the Colonial Office (p. 90). The views on chieftaincy attributed to Akufo Addo and William Ofori Atta (p. 93) are in fact wrong and indicate Mr. Bing's basic ignorance of the political history of Ghana. Mr. Bing's account of how Nkrumah was called to the general secretaryship of the United Gold Coast Convention (p. 93) is, to say the least, fanciful. It is not true to say that Casely Hayford resigned office once "he was convinced that he was not a success" (p. 119). R. R. Amponsah was not a member of the Constitutional Commission appointed by the N.L.C. after the Coup (p. 240) nor were Busia, Dombo, and Joe Appiah, leaders of the Opposition to Nkrumah (pp. 266-67) etc., etc.

When Mr. Bing claims, *inter alia*, that Sir Arku Korsah was a link between the C.P.P. and the "old ruling families" (p. 311) he shows that he did not grasp the movement of opinion in Ghana. When he speaks repeatedly of the "aristocratic families," "the ruling families," or people from "royal families"; when he describes the C.P.P. as being "in its final analysis, a peasant party" (p. 122); when he claims that terms like "Marxists" and "non-denominational christianity" had a "revolutionary ring" in the ears of the farmers (pp. 124-25); when he declares that during the agitation over federation in Ghana the poorer farmers sided with the C.P.P. while the wealthy farmers lined up behind the chiefs (p. 158); when he refers to the "Zongos" as "the working-class quarters of (Ghana's) large towns" (p. 127) etc., etc., Mr. Bing shows his lack of understanding of Ghanaian society and himself a victim of the delusions of old-fashioned Western European class-conscious socialists.

This ignorance was partly due to the mystical belief in ideology which seemed to them to produce infallible solutions on *a priori* grounds, and partly to the fact that they did not understand any Ghanaian language, and without this could scarcely ever hope to understand Ghanaian society. Thus, the left-wing advisers' basically Euro-centric views were accentuated and Nkrumah was bombarded with advice and suggestions and prescriptions which alienated him further and further from Ghanaians. And as the policies based on their advice engendered more and more opposition, the totalitarian apparatus was given greater force. This went on until (to adapt Marx) the nationalist and freedom-loving Ghanaian society became incompatible with its foreign and totalitarian integument; the system burst asunder and the oppressors felt themselves oppressed, if temporarily.<sup>5</sup>

THE MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE never meant—and still does not mean—the physical expulsion of Europeans from the Continent of Africa or any part of it. But it meant and still does mean removing them from policy-making positions so that the indigenous people or their accredited representatives can gain full control over these positions. That is why sometimes the total number of Europeans in a colony, as in Ghana, can actually increase after independence. Once Africans are in the policy-making positions they realise that they need people with particular technical skills, doctors, engineers, managers and administrators, agriculturalists, sometimes even lawyers, if their development is to be rapid and effective. However, the ideological “advisers” of Nkrumah and other African leaders scarcely belong to this category of persons with particular technical skills; they are strictly men of “policy.” They seek to influence and direct the policy-making organs of the independent African countries. To the extent that they succeed in driving away independent-minded and educated Africans from the centre of decision-making they become the new colonialists, foreigners controlling the policy-making organs of African countries. Mr. Bing asks the question: “Is there any way in which individuals with political experience in the developed countries can assist in serving the development of the less developed world?” If Africans mean to be masters in their own house, if they mean to pursue policies that are in tune with the freely expressed wishes and aspirations of the African “masses,” then the answer to this question must be an emphatic “No!”

ARE WE TOO CLOSE to the Nkrumah era in Ghana and Africa to be able to write a definitive and objective history of it? I am afraid that we cannot even assume too readily that this era is past. The best that can be done now is to ensure that all viewpoints are available for the future historian.

<sup>6</sup> An example is *Africa and the World*, a review published in London, which has been carrying scurrilous attacks on post-Coup Ghana. The magazine was set up with Ghanaian public funds by Nkrumah, but it is completely under the control of an Englishman. See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the Commercial Activities of the Erstwhile Publicity Secretariat*. (Ghana Information Services, Accra, 1967). Par. 86–98 and 185–186. See also *Nkrumah's Deception of Africa* (Ghana Information Service, Accra, 1966) ch. XII.

I would not wish to deny that Nkrumah had solid achievements to his credit. The ideals he preached, if through sheer percussive propaganda, have had an impact on the minds of Ghanaians, especially the younger ones. “Social justice,” “Pan-African unity,” “anti-colonialism” and “positive neutrality”; the insistence that social services like education and health services should be made available to all; that in the affairs of the state the “poorest he” counts as much as the “richest he”; that it is a worthwhile, indeed an urgent, object of public policy to bring all African countries under one effective government; and that material aid ought to be given by independent countries in Africa to those Africans still fighting against colonialism and minority domination in Southern Africa—these, among others, are part of every Ghanaian’s mental equipment nowadays. Indeed, judged by these very standards, Nkrumah had failed so miserably by 1966 that Ghanaians of all classes in that year of liberation could not help but rejoice enthusiastically at his downfall. In the practical field, too, Nkrumah’s achievements are undeniable. During the fifteen years of his reign, communications, especially roads and harbours, were improved; social services were extended; new industries were established; the gap between the North (largely neglected in the colonial era) and the rest of the country was narrowed; the country was, by and large, united; and the political consciousness of the average Ghanaian was raised.

However, anyone who knows anything about the history of Ghana before Nkrumah’s rule cannot be impressed by the exaggerations with which his achievements are held out to the outside world and the rest of Africa by his ideological admirers on the Left and also by his professional propagandists.<sup>6</sup> Lofty ideals in politics and public life, including those of “Pan-Africanism” and the need to uphold the dignity of the African, have been commonplace in Ghana for at least a century. When a Ghanaian thinks of the proud cultures of the various ethnic groups making up Ghana today, and of such distinguished public figures as Mensah Sarbah, Attoh Ahuma, Casely Hayford, James Kwegyir Aggrey, the leaders of the Fanti Confederacy, Nana Sir Ofori Atta I, Dr. Danquah, *et al.*, he cannot help feeling hurt when non-Ghanaians talk and write as if Ghana was a collection of lost peoples without a history, without culture, and without a tradition of public service until Nkrumah appeared on the scene—as if Nkrumah was to Ghana what Newton was said to be to Science:

*Ghana and Ghana's people lay hid in Night;  
God said "Let Nkrumah be" and all was Light.*

Nor can one wax ecstatic over Nkrumah's practical achievements because he had fifteen years to unfold the genius to which he so immoderately laid claim: after all the country never lacked adequate economic resources to support its development. The colonial era, despite its acute shortcomings and its basically objectionable character, was not the stagnant era of waste that the latter-day *simplificateurs* would have us believe. Even during the colonial era Ghana, then the Gold Coast, was already ahead of all other colonies in tropical Africa (including the Belgian Congo and the Rhodesias, if one considers only the Africans and excludes the over-privileged and pampered white minorities). That is why one Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Alan Burns, could describe the country in 1947 as "the model colony," and is, indeed, the basic reason why the Gold Coast was the first colony in Black Tropical Africa to become independent.

The question, then, is not what Nkrumah achieved, but what he *could* have achieved with the time and resources at his disposal.

I SHOULD LIKE to isolate five specific factors which engendered much opposition to Nkrumah, especially in educated Ghanaian circles, in spite of his achievements:

1. **IRRATIONALITY.** Nkrumah's régime was utterly irrational in its approach to problems. The independence movement thrived on intense emotionalism and consequently it threw up people whose only qualification for leadership was the ability to arouse passions. These people in fact depended on excitement for the sustenance of their support, and

<sup>7</sup>In Parliament Nkrumah was a pathetic figure. His speeches were incoherent and the cut and thrust of debate was utterly beyond him. But he came alive when he addressed crowds at party rallies or when he addressed such bodies as Freedom Fighters' conferences where emotional symbols could be manipulated with complete freedom.

<sup>8</sup>Mr. Bing treats Nkrumah's exploitation of religion with indulgence. It would appear that Mr. Bing himself caught a little of the air of superstition which surrounded Nkrumah. He harps a lot on "shrines" and "juju." Close association between the Army and shrines facilitated the organisation of the Coup, according to Mr. Bing. And the Asantehene's membership of the Society of Freemasons is interpreted in terms of "juju" and shrines (pp. 124-133). Or is he merely measuring up to what is expected of Africa?

Nkrumah himself desperately needed it in order to bolster up his "charismatic" appeal. Indeed, it was only when he was in an emotional mood that he felt politically at ease.<sup>7</sup> He therefore found it essential to generate an atmosphere of burning intensity. That is why he exploited religious forms so much.<sup>8</sup> Such an atmosphere, however, put intelligence and reason at a discount. It put a premium on quackery and charlatanism. Critics who insisted on applying rational canons to problems became "enemies of the people" because they were, indirectly, undermining the *Osagyefo's* position. This partly explains some of the paradoxes of Nkrumah's régime. His obvious preference for corrupt and semi-literate *yes-men* was not exactly calculated to realise his publicly proclaimed aims. The manner in which decisions involving the expenditure of millions of pounds of public money were sometimes taken was simply irresponsible, even frivolous. And the uses to which public funds were sometimes put were incompatible with the proclaimed objective of rapid economic development.

Mr. Bing himself cites good examples of irrational decisions—although he seems to admire them. Ghana's purchase of VC-10 aircraft was justified; only "what was lacking was diplomatic negotiation of landing rights, the scientific prospecting of new routes and technical planning generally" (p. 398). The whole of the Ghana Airways enterprise was well conceived; only "all that was missing was the staff able to work out in detail the complicated arrangements necessary to make it work." Indeed, "often an opportunity was opened up but somewhere along the line the specialist, the administrator, the technician or even the typist needed to despatch the letter was missing and the project came to nothing in consequence." It does not occur to Mr. Bing that what he is defending is a magnificent formula for throwing away millions of pounds of real money.

Those who dared to criticise were dubbed "imperialist stooges," "reactionary intellectuals" guilty of the crime of possessing an "Oxbridge mentality," "neo-colonialist stooges," or worse. Yet how, without adopting severely rational methods, can we ever hope (in Nkrumah's words) "to accomplish in a single generation what it has taken developed nations 300 years or more to achieve"?

2. **CORRUPTION.** Corruption was not brought into Ghana by Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (C.P.P.), nor has it disappeared from the country's political scene. One cannot even hope that it will ever disappear

completely. All that could legitimately be asked of Nkrumah was that he should take steps to reduce its incidence in the society. But this never happened. Indeed it was obvious that he preferred to work with corrupt politicians. Persons who were condemned as corrupt by Commissions of Enquiry set up by the government itself received promotions or were merely transferred to other posts.<sup>9</sup> Reports of Commissions of Enquiry were doctored by the government before publication<sup>10</sup> in order to shield Nkrumah's henchmen. It was widely believed that cuts on contracts and purchases of ships, planes and locomotives were taken by his Ministers and some Senior Civil Servants.<sup>11</sup> The Cocoa Purchasing Company and, after it, the United Farmers Co-operative Council, set up to help the farmers, were engaged in systematically defrauding the farmers.<sup>12</sup> Vast sums of money en-

trusted to party hacks and dubious characters for subversive work in other African countries were known to be diverted into private pockets.

Rather than check these practices Nkrumah turned them to his personal advantage—by using the evidence of corruption to blackmail those guilty into intensifying their personal support for him. So utterly dependent did his corrupt henchmen thus become that a very powerful reason for upholding his position at all costs and by any means was their simple desire to stay out of jail. Nkrumah himself was also believed to be personally corrupt. In launching the Seven-Year Development Plan in March 1964, Nkrumah appealed to his countrymen to repatriate their foreign capital back home. His own parliamentary supporters openly laughed at him. After his departure from Parliament House one of them whispered in a Ghanaian language, in a tone distinct enough to be heard in the gallery, that "he should first repatriate his..."<sup>13</sup> But the evidence of the extent of his corruption that has come out since the Coup has surprised even his severest critics in Ghana.

Nkrumah's supporters have poohpoohed accusations of corruption against their hero on various grounds. One is that he did not distinguish between his private pocket and public coffers, "like an African chief." But still, under Nkrumah, humble public servants were jailed for failing to make this very elementary and healthy distinction. Another ground is that in his will Nkrumah gave everything to the State. Does this mean that the right to purloin from the public chest on condition that the remainder of what is purloined will be handed back to the state on one's death-bed should be conceded to every public official? A last ground is that in every developing country and, indeed, in every political system there is corruption. And does this mean that since in every society there are common burglars, no one need complain about burglary? In any case, Nkrumah is accused not of political corruption but of personal corruption having nothing to do with politics (e.g., dishing out public funds to jujumen and numerous paramours). It is important that Africans should not be taken in by "theories of corruption" in developing countries because in our economic conditions the type of corruption we have experienced is a fundamental factor in retarding economic development. Mr. Bing's indulgent attitude to corruption in Ghanaian society can only be viewed by a Ghanaian with utter dismay. A Minister's wife buys a real golden bed (a purchase that was headline-news at the time it occurred). Mr. Bing sees in this only the Minister's retort to the Ashanti Golden Stool, and he adds insult to injury by describing the Minister as "a sincere egalitarian..."

<sup>9</sup> Two famous examples may be cited. Mr. Krobo Edusei was condemned in 1954 when he was a junior minister by a Commission of Enquiry headed by Sir Arku Korsah (the most senior of the Ghanaian judges and soon to become Chief Justice) as unfit to hold public office. In spite of this, he rose to Cabinet rank and later became Minister of Interior responsible for administering the Preventive Detention Act. Mr. Bing, understandably, makes no reference to this aspect of Mr. Krobo Edusei's history. Mr. Djin was first dismissed from public office in 1956 as a result of censure by a Commission of Enquiry, an action which Mr. Bing describes as "justified" (p. 179). He, however, forgets to add that Mr. Djin later rose to become ambassador to the Congo and a Cabinet Minister and to be condemned (again) by another Commission of Enquiry!

<sup>10</sup> Examples are the *Report of Commission of Enquiry into alleged Irregularities and Malpractices in connection with the Issue of Import Licences (1964)* (The "Akainya Report") and *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Trade Malpractices in Ghana*. (The "Abraham Report"). Chapter 3 of the *Akainya Report* was omitted from the published version, but the government forgot to re-number the chapters. Mr. Bing passes over the histories of these Commissions in meaningful silence.

<sup>11</sup> These suspicions and rumours have been amply substantiated since the Coup. See *Report of the Commission to enquire into Kwame Nkrumah Properties*; *Report of the Commission to enquire into the Affairs of Nadeco Limited* and *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Irregularities and Malpractices in the Grant of Import Licences (1967)* (The "Ollennu Report") all published by the Ministry of Information, Accra, 1966-7.

<sup>12</sup> See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the Cocoa Purchasing Company Limited (1956)* and *Report of the Committee of Enquiry on the Local Purchasing of Cocoa* (Ministry of Information, Accra).

liberty, equality and fraternity summed up his political philosophy."<sup>13</sup>

3. **D**ICTATORSHIP. It is not at all clear why Nkrumah's supporters (communists apart) deny that his system of government, at any rate since 1960, was dictatorial. To those Africans who lived in fear of the midnight knock on the door; to those whose breadwinners could vanish overnight; to those who could lose their livelihood and their jobs at the *diktat* of the *Osagyefo* (or even of a District Commissioner); to those whose property could be seized, not through any due process of law, but by the mere command of the "boss"; to those who were systematically spied upon, and to those university lecturers whose lectures were constantly "reported"; to those who suffered the paralytic effect of the Preventive Detention Act—the régime was clearly and unmistakably

<sup>13</sup> Mr. Bing's account of how the commission into the affairs of the Cocoa Purchasing Company came to be set up is to say the least, curious (pp.170-2). His treatment of the Savundra case (in Ghana) is strange. But his treatment of Nkrumah's corruption is astonishing (pp. 401-4). He ignores solid proof that has come out since the Coup and refuses to deal with numerous scandalous deals; he battles, as usual, with the British press and even draws invidious comparisons with royalty in Europe and the Middle East in an attempt to cover up his hero's corruption. In this exercise he is sometimes reckless. He claims, for example, that commissions of Inquiry established since the Coup have confirmed that Nkrumah transferred no money outside and that no one had come forward to prove that Nkrumah had a large fortune in Ghana (p. 404).

Unfortunately for Mr. Bing, these very points have been specifically established by the *Report of the Commission to Enquire into the Kwame Nkrumah Properties* (1966), especially par. 110, 336, 496 and 497.

<sup>14</sup> See the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1965 (Act 290), and the Presidential Elections Act, 1965 (Act 292), section 4 (b)-(d).

<sup>15</sup> His paranoiac tendencies were helped along by several persons, both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian. Mr. Bing's whole narrative is an eloquent testimony to his own personal contribution. M. Habib Niang, a Senegalese pseudo-intellectual, once claimed in a talk at the University of Ghana that Nkrumah was "the world's first real political philosopher," better than Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, *et al.*, "all put together." A Cabinet Minister, also in a speech at the University of Ghana not long before the Coup, compared Nkrumah to Christ. (He was one of the first people to denounce Nkrumah after his downfall.)

<sup>16</sup> See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the Commercial Activities of the Erstwhile Publicity Secretariat* (Ministry of Information, Accra), esp. paras. 1-12 and 82-132.

dictatorial. And the dictatorship was no less real to those pathetic followers of Nkrumah (Ministers, members of the Central Committee of "the Party," M.P.s, Special Advisers and Party officials) who moaned in private and praised in public; they gathered enough courage to criticise the "Old Man" in his absence, but trembled in his presence.

The Republican Constitution of 1960 elevated the President above Parliament, and subsequent amendments increased further the concentration of power in his own hands. (The last one in fact decreed that no one could be nominated for the Presidency unless he was a member of the C.P.P. and his nomination approved by Nkrumah!<sup>14</sup>) He sought to bring all institutions under the party, which had itself degenerated into his personal machine. The only two important institutions he had not succeeded in capturing by the time of the Coup were the churches and the universities. But by that time he had usurped the power (contrary to the law passed by his own Parliament and approved by himself) to appoint the Vice-Chancellors; and he also claimed, unsuccessfully (thanks to the resistance of Dr. O'Brien), the power to direct the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana to appoint his Party men Professors. The "Central Committee of the C.P.P.," in whose name important decisions (*i.e.*, dismissing M.P.s from Parliament) were often announced, did not in practice exist; and the M.P.s dared not criticise the *Osagyefo*, the Government, or "the Party." The whole authoritarian farce was finally unmasked when (in 1965) a whole Parliament of 198 members was hand-picked by "the Central Committee" and returned "unopposed"!

4. **M**EGALOMANIA. This was the most abiding quality of the man.<sup>15</sup> This helps to explain a lot of what I have already described. Irrationalism, corruption, and dictatorship were all anchored in Nkrumah's megalomania. What was called opposition to Nkrumah often consisted only in a firm refusal to join in exacerbating the disease. There was no place one could not get by singing the man's praises, no corruption one could not get away with through adulation. There were always doubts about the authorship of his books, but he never acknowledged his debts to his ghost writers or even to his research assistants. He announced on the radio that he was not "the maker but the instrument of history" and that he was "the conscience of the nation." The whole public relations apparatus of the government, both internal and external, was geared to building him up as the indispensable leader of Ghana and Africa<sup>16</sup> and his African policy was constructed

on that assumption. So "Freedom Fighters" did not only come to Ghana, but had to be fêted; they did not only travel about on Ghana's ticket, but had to do so *de luxe*; they did not only have to be accommodated in New York at Ghana's expense, but in first-class hotels. No wonder many of them could never go back to their countries as real "Freedom Fighters." The truth is that Nkrumah was systematically bribing them with Ghana's money so that they would support him for the leadership of Africa. Those who refused to be hoodwinked in this way were given short shrift. For his megalomania alone, if not for anything else, Nkrumah had to be removed if the country were ever to return to a path of sober progress.

5. **M**ISMANAGEMENT. How could an economy survive the combined effect of so much unreason, so much corruption, so cruel a dictatorship and so wild-eyed a leader? Much has been made of the drop in the world price of cocoa, but Nkrumah cannot be blamed for that. What he was and should be justifiably blamed for was the alarming way in which he managed the economy, for he managed it as if the country had such abundant resources that waste did not matter. By the time of the Coup the cumulative losses of state enterprises were in the region of £15 million (money still had to be found to pay the credits with which they

were originally set up). In 1965 when the price of cocoa reached its lowest point since World War II, Nkrumah (without reference to anybody) decided to put up, solely for the Organisation of African Unity conference in Accra that year, a vast complex of buildings costing £10 million.<sup>17</sup> Dubious contracts involving several tens of millions of pounds were signed with businessmen of equally dubious character. Contracts were signed with East European countries which enabled them to fob off on Ghana second-hand machinery (repainted as new) and extremely shoddy consumer goods. More than £3 million were spent on an 18-mile stretch of prestige motor-way near the capital—in an economy crying for countryside feeder-roads. The pattern of the government's expenditure showed no signs of reflecting the crisis in the besieged economy. He claimed (so it was said) that no country had ever been taken to court for indebtedness! (Even this was not true: cf. the history of Liberia.) It was too much to ask the country to believe that the drop in cocoa price was responsible for the shortages in consumer-goods like car spares, raw materials, books, etc., while millions of pounds were being wasted. The economy's disease was *white-elephantiasis*. No wonder the standard of living of Ghanaians actually decreased during the latter years of Nkrumah's rule.<sup>18</sup> Relief just had to come.

<sup>17</sup> Mr. Bing argues that the conference buildings would (by offering facilities for international conferences) have provided a good basis for the tourist trade in Ghana. As he knows only too well, no examination of such a policy was ever made before millions of pounds were committed. In any case all attempts since the Coup to use the buildings for that very purpose have failed. A look at the main building—a veritable prison-house of sixty super-luxury flats—will quickly remind any observer of its original purpose: to provide accommodation of maximum security for the Heads of States and Governments attending the O.A.U. conference in Accra in 1965.

The truth of the matter is that Nkrumah hoped to entice the conference to base the permanent headquarters of the O.A.U. in Accra. Needless to say, the Heads of States and Government scented the bait and immediately decided to select Addis Ababa as the permanent headquarters.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Bing seeks to give the impression that all attempts to get an economic adviser of stature before Independence were deliberately frustrated by the Colonial Office (pp. 145-47). But he quietly passes over the fact that later the government obtained the services of no less an economist than Professor Arthur Lewis. The fact that Mr. Bing nowhere in his narrative so much as mentions his name shows how untrustworthy his account basically is.

**N**KRUMAH's supporters have gone through many a mental gyration to prove, on no evidence at all, that Ghana's Coup on 24 February 1966 was organised by outside forces, especially the American C.I.A.

The most unreliable section of Mr. Bing's book is that dealing with the Coup and conditions in Ghana after it. He tries by all kinds of ingenious arguments to blame the U.S.A., the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, and Israel. Every type of circumstantial evidence is dragged in without avail, and he is finally forced to resort to "the type of analysis the fictional detective generally is portrayed as using..." (p. 435). The only solid conclusion he arrives at is that "it is impossible to say more than there is a *prima-facie* case that the C.I.A. may have had a hand in the plot" (p. 433). Yet by the end of the book Mr. Bing is claiming positively that the "revolt" was "no doubt" provoked by "direct" Western "intervention in Ghanaian internal affairs" (p. 449). To go one better, he also implies that the Opposition "engineered" the Coup (p. 306) and, again, that the Coup was all a tribal conspiracy by Ewes (p. 427). Incidentally, Mr. Bing's own

star witness, Kwame Nkrumah, can bring forward no evidence either in support of the thesis, which he also naturally upholds, that the Coup was the work of outside forces:

In Ghana the embassies of the United States, Britain and Germany were all implicated in the plot to overthrow my government. It is alleged that the U.S. Ambassador Franklin Williams offered the traitors 13 million dollars to carry out a *coup d'état*. Afrifa, Harley and Kotoka were to get a large share of this if they would assassinate me at Accra Airport as I prepared to leave for Hanoi. I understand Afrifa said: "I think I will fail" and declined the offer. So apparently did the others... (*Dark Days in Ghana*, p. 49).

Nkrumah sees better evidence of foreign intervention in the depressed world cocoa price in 1965. According to him, the U.S.A. and Britain forced down the price of cocoa as "part of their policy of preparing the economic ground for political action in the form of a 'coup' and a change of government" (p. 95). So no sooner had the Coup taken place than "the price of cocoa suddenly rose on the world market." However, Mr. Bing has to admit that the price of cocoa started picking up *before* the Coup and that by the time of the Coup it had reached £177 per ton.

Mr. Bing's ideas about post-Coup conditions in Ghana are built on exaggerations and half-truths. He paints a gloomy picture of the economy, happily forgetting to add that this was the inevitable and direct result of Nkrumah's economic recklessness. He harps on the alleged lack of press freedom in Ghana. But a glance at the press in post-Coup Ghana will show two startling differences from the Nkrumah era. (1) While full press freedom

has by no means been achieved the state-owned press is much, much freer than it ever was under Nkrumah. (2) Since the Coup, the *Pioneer* (an Opposition paper suppressed by Nkrumah's régime) has been resurrected and has been highly critical of the N.L.C.; and there has been established at the University of Ghana a new bi-monthly, the *Legon Observer*, which is independent and has been saying things which no newspaper could dare say under the Nkrumah régime. Mr. Bing fails to mention these papers. He claims that the N.L.C. régime is "naked police and army rule." To any unprejudiced observer the present régime in Ghana is liberalism itself compared with the Nkrumah régime. Mr. Bing claims that the reorganisation of the courts was a "purge of judges who had ruled against them in *habeas corpus* proceedings and the like" (p. 415). If he can believe this he can believe anything (and he does).

It is futile to argue with such minds. For their conclusions are embedded in their premises: by definition Nkrumah could only be overthrown by the Devil and his collaborators. The proper question for Ghanaians—and for Africans generally—is a solemn one, and one that should lead to reflection and self-criticism. Why is it that an African leader, who started off with immense popular support, appeared so well-meaning and was looked to by the whole of Africa for leadership, should in the end have been rejected by his own people? Why, in fact, should his own people have rejoiced with such uninhibited ecstasy at his overthrow?

In the failure of Nkrumah lies a Ghanaian tragedy. In the failure of Africans to learn the true lessons from his downfall will lie an African tragedy.

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## NOTES & TOPICS

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# The Price of Nihilism

DR. E. J. MISHAN'S [ENCOUNTER, March 1969] thoughts on university reform are headlined as "heretical." This is, of course, too modest. There is nothing "heretical" about them. Academic economists everywhere are propounding these prescriptions for the proper financing of universities, so that they will be freer from the pressure of state money, and for the proper financing of students, so that they (and their parents) will be freer to choose what they want, and do not want, to study.

Nobody sketched the baselines of an economic approach better than Dr. Mishan's colleague Professor Harry Johnson, in his inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics in October 1967.<sup>1</sup>

Taking the troubles at L.S.E. as one of his clinical examples of the proper economic approach to social questions, Professor Johnson stated a series of propositions. The first was the fact of "the general democratisation of higher education," largely or entirely financed through government. The consequence of this, he argued, since it was no longer the old and recognised *élite* that was being educated, was that "the teachers ask themselves whether they are getting money for their value, and the taught ask themselves whether they are getting value for their (or their society's) money."

Cut off from the old Oxbridge esteem, and asked to work in London or elsewhere for less than they could get in other bureaucratic occupations, the dons "have on the average reduced the amount of work they have been willing or accustomed to provide in exchange for their salaries, in order to make up the difference by outside earnings." Marginally, therefore, the standards of appointment to academic jobs have been lowered to bring in men and women willing to do the job of teaching the new non-*élite*.

The core of complaint by those students who still wish to be taught and examined in the established fashion is thus given, quite unemotionally, its justification. This characteristically precise argument by Professor Johnson is only

put a bit askew because the present wish of many dissident students—and not necessarily anarchic or nihilistic ones—is not at all to be taught according to the conventional canon, and assumptions, of the old Oxbridge *élite*. What they want is that the right sort of teachers should be available for the new sort, as they see it, of teacher/taught dialogue. What has happened to them is that the gap between them and their teachers, between teachers and taught, has widened, not just for economic reasons but for ideological ones as well. They mean something different by "democratisation."

The particular points of Professor Johnson's economic analysis, latched directly on to the L.S.E.'s own recent troubles, went straighter to the point. The School, sitting prescriptively on a narrow near-City London site that is "an increasingly uneconomic location for the pursuit of undergraduate education," can offer only overcrowding and congestion to both students and staff. The "impact of this pressure of the laws of rent" means that there is an incentive for staff to minimise their time spent within the School, and for students to maximise the time they spend, in crowds, there. The perilous gap, and the frustration of student/staff expectations, are widened physically.

DR. MISHAN IS NOT concerned, overtly, with the peculiar circumstances of L.S.E. He is concerned with the "general democratisation of higher education," and its generally ill effects, economically, educationally and politically. Traditionally, Professor Johnson argued, higher education has derived its value from the means of entry it has given to a national, and limited, *élite*. Now, with the growth of higher education, financed by the rest of society, there is no guarantee of entry to whatever *élite* society may still retain. Indeed, with the old Oxbridge-style gates to the old places of influence, if not power, cut down, there is no obvious reason, Dr. Mishan argues, why State aid to higher or further education should give its preference to the now pseudo-*élite* of the present enlarged regiment of 200,000 university students. Why these who have managed to get university places, and not the others who have not? Dr. Mishan suggests a lot of cost/benefit sums, both in terms of individual students and in terms of society's gains and losses, to bolster his view that the money might be better spent, both individually and socially. He does not exactly prove anything.

It might look as if Dr. Mishan believed in an even wider "democratisation of higher education" than Professor Johnson was talking about. But this is not really his point, as I try to

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Johnson, "The Economic Approach to Social Questions," *Economica* (London), February 1968.