

# PAN-AFRICANISM AT ACCRA

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THE All African Peoples' Conference opened in Accra on a blazing December day. The Freedom-and-Justice arch, Nkrumah's bronze statue, the new fountain in the Kwame Nkrumah Circle, all gleamed in the sun. The famous Accra breakers beat up against Christiansborg Castle.

The Ambassador, Ghana's luxury hotel, was decked out with flags and coloured lights. The Arden Hall was set with benches and trestle tables. Over three hundred delegates from the trade unions and political parties of twenty eight African countries were expected. In Western suits, in shirt sleeves, in white robes and beaded caps, they signed on at the Secretariat, received their freedom badges and gathered on the terrace. It was a time for putting faces to well-known names—Kojo Botsio, Dr. Hastings Banda, Tom Mboya, Michael Scott. Mrs. Paul Robeson apologised for the absence of her husband; Mrs William du Bois brought the good wishes of hers. For some it was the first visit to a non-colour-bar country. A South African ordered whisky with a flamboyant gesture.

The conference was planned last March by the African leaders who gathered in Accra to celebrate Ghana Independence Day. Its purpose? To co-ordinate 'the African non-violent revolution', to raise the morale of Africans from Cape to Cairo, and to discuss the possibilities of federation.

By the week-end most of the delegates had arrived. They fell into three categories—those from the independent countries, those from predominantly African countries where independence is a matter of time and diplomacy, and those from countries still under settler or imperial domination.

Delegations from the independent countries came—on paper at any rate—as an expression of Nkrumah's dictum that the independence of any country is meaningless unless it is linked to the total liberation of Africa. The U.A.R. delegation was strong (too strong some said). Its leader Fouad Galal, Vice-President of the Egyptian National Assembly, a squat, powerful man with an impressive knowledge of African affairs, was everywhere—consulting, interpreting. M. Slim, the Tunisian ambassador in London, advised tactfully on the administrative side.

Bowler-hatted and cigared, the Liberians preached caution in a strong American accent.

In the second group, the Nigerians were outstanding. Though there was some rivalry between the representatives of the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons and those of the Action Group, the calibre of the delegates was undeniable. They were not only determined, they were also efficient. And by the end they had taken over most of the secretarial work in the committees.

The conference came at an embarrassing time for French Africa. The principal leaders and the principal parties had just said 'yes' to De Gaulle. They were unable, therefore, to take part in the simple condemnation of imperialism. Houphouët-Boigny, the African leader from the Ivory Coast, is now a member of the French cabinet. He dare not offend France. As a result delegates from French Africa came mainly from the smaller parties which campaigned for a 'no' vote. They were vocal, but unrepresentative.

But the strongest, if the most unorthodox, delegations came from those countries still under settler domination. Three members came from the Kenya Legislative Council—Tom Mboya, the trade unionist who was later made chairman of the conference, Dr. Gikonyo Kiano, a shrewd, humorous Kikuyu, and James Muimi, solid, charming, reliable. Dr. Hastings Banda came from Nyasaland, Kaunda and Nkumbula from Northern Rhodesia, and Nkomo from Southern Rhodesia. From South Africa came two rather conflicting delegations, one from the Liberal Party and one from the African National Congress. There were representatives from Algeria, the Belgian Congo and from Angola. All of these were out to exert pressure. Algeria asked for a Pan-African army, Kenya for a Freedom Fund, South Africa for an economic blockade. "We do not want pious resolutions," they said, "we want action."

During the first few days it seemed that the conference might end, not in an affirmation of African unity, but in an open split between Cairo and Accra. Several things aggravated this. First, the Middle East press claimed that the conference had really been called by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee; second, several Africans resident in Cairo came to the conference claiming to represent their own countries; and third, the Algerian and Egyptian delegates asked that the word 'non-violent' should be erased from the agenda.

Nkrumah was clearly anxious that nothing should be said or resolved which would offend the United Nations, the Commonwealth or America. And, if it was, he wanted to be quite sure that the Ghana government was not implicated. During the first few days, Ghanaians leant over backwards to assure everyone that this was not a governmental conference and that when Nkrumah spoke, he did so as life chairman of the Convention People's Party and not as Prime Minister. But with the general acceptance of Tom Mboya as chairman and with a realisation of the harm an open split would do to the African cause, things simmered down and the final resolutions were unanimously accepted.

The opening session was on Monday. Accra's Community Centre, a white painted building overlooking the sea, was hung with flags and banners. Across the roof was written 'Forward to Independence, Now' and inside 'Hands Off Africa! Africa Must Be Free.' Ghanaians lined the route with placards—'Africa One Voice', 'La Lutte Continue', 'Down With Chiefs'.

Nkrumah's speech was proud, reasoned, calm. He condemned all forms of imperialism, called for the emergence of a new Africa, united and free, and promised that he would support non-violent action in all parts of the continent. His advice to delegates was: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you.' His only controversial remark came right at the end. "Do not let us forget," he said, "that colonialism and imperialism may come to us yet in a different guise, not necessarily from Europe."

In the afternoon, committees were set up to discuss imperialism and colonialism, racial discrimination, tribalism, federation and the possibility of establishing a permanent secretariat. These were to meet in private session in the afternoons.

In the mornings, heads of delegations addressed the conference. These speeches ranged from the hysterical to the moving, from the practical to the comic. Most impressive of all was the address of the Angola delegate—read by the chairman lest the Portuguese should take reprisals on his family. "The Portuguese," he wrote, "have declared their intention of ruling us in exactly this way for ever. Angolans work 14 hours a day, seven days a week. There are 68 African children in secondary school. Now I am here I can never go back." He was followed by an Algerian—thin, fanatical, intelligent. "If Africa is to be free," he said, "we cannot beg, we must tear

away by force." Later in the morning Ezekiel Mphahlele, the South African writer, spoke. He described, simply and graphically, the conditions under which the Africans in South Africa live. "I come here," he ended, "in the faith that when the time comes we shall have the support of every country and of every African on the continent." If they served no other purpose, these speeches gave West Africa an eye-witness account of what settler domination can mean, and many delegates were thoughtful when they left the hall.

The committees almost immediately ran into difficulties. Each consisted of more than fifty people and had to be conducted in French and English. There were no proper interpreters, and few people had any idea of committee work. It was here that the Nigerians showed their quality. They submitted neat memoranda on every topic, and time and again cut down the argument and insisted that practical rather than inflammatory resolutions should be discussed.

Rumours filtered through. The violence issue was causing trouble again. The Algerians were insisting on a Pan-African army. In the fourth committee, there was criticism of the way Nkrumah had managed the Ghana-Guinea union. Led by the Nigerians, West African leaders asked that he consult them all before framing the constitution. They resented his assumption that other countries, as they became independent, would automatically 'adhere' to Ghana and Guinea.

But by the closing session all the difficulties had been removed, and the resolutions were unanimously accepted. There was some doubt as to whether the right copies had been circulated to the press, but the main lines were clear. A Permanent Secretariat was to be set up in Accra and a full-time Secretary-General appointed. A Freedom Fund was to be established to receive money from governments and organisations within Africa and from those organisations outside Africa which had the approval of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was to meet every six months; the full conference once a year.

The violence issue was neatly decided to the satisfaction of Nkrumah, Fouad Galal and the Algerians. The resolution read: "That this conference declares its full support to all fighters for freedom in Africa, to all those who resort to peaceful means of non-violence and civil disobedience, as well as to all those who are compelled to retaliate against violence to attain national independence and freedom for the people. Where such

retaliation becomes necessary, the conference condemns all legislation which treats those who fight for their independence and freedom as ordinary criminals."

Concrete proposals were that the independent countries at government level, and the other countries at a personal level, should institute an immediate boycott of South African goods; that a human rights committee should be set up to investigate complaints from any African country, whether dependent or independent; and that an African Legion should be set up "to protect the freedom of the African peoples" (no further gloss or comment was given on this).

In conclusion Nkrumah spoke. He seemed easier and more fluent. He stressed the need for Africans to think not only of freedom but also of unity, and he urged all countries—whether independent or on the verge of independence—to consider the values of federation. "The scales have fallen from our eyes," he ended. "We have got a clear vision of the future. We shall, from now on, march forward in solid phalanx, united in the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, so formidable in our strength that all the forces ranged against us shall not prevail." He was thunderously cheered.

The delegates returned home; the Steering Committee persevered for a few days longer. In the end they postponed the appointment of the Secretary-General and agreed to meet again in June. The flags drooped; the terraces were empty.

What did the conference achieve? Perhaps on paper not very much, but a beginning has been made. The way is open for more detailed discussion on specific topics, and there is now an official organisation through which one African country can communicate with another. Morale has undoubtedly been raised; South Africa has met Algeria.

But much organisation is needed. The success of Pan-Africanism will depend to a large extent on the ability and imagination of those permanently in Accra. George Padmore is not enough. There are already too few African administrators. Can anyone of the right kind be spared for the job of Secretary-General? Much depends on the answer to this question. The real gains made by this conference still have to be capitalised.