

RUTH FIRST

The Barrel of a Gun

Political Power in
Africa and the
Coup d'Etat

Part IV: The Failure of Politics

First published by Allen Lane The Penguin Press in 1970

Republished in 2012 by the Ruth First Papers Project

www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk



Part IV

The Failure of Politics

Many of Africa's new states entered independence, though nominally nation states, more divided than united. Conquest had resulted in the establishment of colonies within artificial boundaries, and diverse societies had been administered piecemeal without any national integrating political system. The test of independence politics was to rest largely on the attempt of the parties and the politicians to devise a unifying political purpose for their countries and peoples.

The Sudan entered independence carrying a double load of disunity. In the North and in the South, two systems of administration had been operated, with the one sealed off from the other. But North-South divisions apart, the Sudan throughout its history had been pawn to the conflict between Britain and the rising nationalism of Egypt. It owed its earlier-than-expected independence to events abroad, in Egypt, rather than at home; and in the years after independence as before them, Sudanese politics were buffeted by conflicting interests, not least those vested in divergent religious sects, which had been inherited from a clash between Egyptian and British- and, later, United States - influences in the Middle East. Little of any significance that happened in Sudanese politics did not have some root in that externally prompted conflict; and few of the political crises in the post-independence years were explicable without reference to it. When the army intervened in the political crisis and took over the government, it, too, acted in the shadow of the same conflict.

Nigeria, the largest state in Africa, was the best-publicized experiment in Western democracy on the continent. But the constitutional structure and political system installed by colonialism filtered all contests, electoral or other, into regional and,

inevitably, ethnic or communal channels. When the political system collapsed under the strain of a particularly fierce struggle over the spoils of power, the ensuing conflict took violent communal forms, expressed ultimately in civil war.

In Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, a policy was enunciated not only for Ghanaian, but for Pan-African unity; not only for the changes that political independence might bring, but for a radical change in the social system, with a commitment to build socialism. Here there was a post-independence strategy and ideology. Yet the regime was put to flight by a whiff of grape-shot in a soldiers' and policemen's coup d'etat; and the strategy and the ideology were blamed by Nkrumah's critics for Ghana's 'collapse'.

Each case, sharply different and yet bearing resemblances in the sources of weakness, needs close scrutiny to detect wherein lay the failure of their politics, and the causes behind the intervention of the military.

The Sudan: Pawn of Two Powers

There must be some sort of general control over the soldiers or else they will land us in all sorts of trouble.

Lord Cromer to Lord Salisbury,
December 1898

After the Mahdist revolution, the army led by General Kitchener that marched in to conquer the Sudan was three-quarters Egyptian and mostly financed by Cairo, under Britain's prompting. After the reconquest itself, a formula was then devised for the government of the Sudan which preserved the fiction that Egypt's own had been restored to her, but which gave Britain actual control. This was the Condominium Agreement for joint sovereignty. The governor-general was assisted by officers in the

Egyptian army as provincial governors and inspectors; but since only junior administrative posts were available to them, Egyptians were denied any real share in the governing of the country.

The military cast of government and administration was one of the dominant characteristics of colonial policy in the Sudan. The other was the nightmare of Egypt. Nothing haunted British policy more assiduously than the fear that the nationalist fervour in the lower reaches of the Nile would travel, to incite 'premature' notions about self-government, and even independence, in the Sudan. For the first two decades, Britain grouped Egypt and the Sudan together as one country for administrative and financial reasons. But after the Egyptian revolution of 1919, it was decided to treat the Sudan as a separate and distinct administrative entity, and to wean her altogether from the Egyptian administration. It was also after 1919 that the administration, as though taking quarantine measures against a plague, cut the Southern provinces of the Sudan formally off from the North. The plan was to join the South with Uganda and Kenya, in a greater East-Central African system. The Sudan was nominally one territory, but it was administered as two. The governors of the three Southern provinces – Behar el Ghazel, Upper Nile and Equatoria – did not attend the annual meetings of the governors at Khartoum, but liaised with their opposite numbers in Uganda and Kenya. The South was declared a closed area to all Northerners except government officials. Southerners were taught English, not Arabic, and were deliberately isolated from Arab and Islamic traditions. The region was thrown open to Christian missions, to establish spheres of influence for crusades among the pagans who, if they were not saved for Christ, would at least be lost to Allah. In 1946, the machine was put into reverse. But by then it was too late. When the Sudan became independent, it was as a country with South and North deeply different from one another. Britain's Southern policy had bequeathed a perpetual source of division.

It was the Egyptian revolution of 1919 that alerted Britain to the crucial strategic importance of the Sudan in the imperial management of Egypt. In a letter written a few months before

the 1919 revolution burst its banks, Wingate wrote: 'As long as we hold the Sudan we hold the key to Egypt because we control the source of its water supply.'² The key was used in 1924, after the assassination in Cairo of Sir Lee Stack, general-in-chief of the Egyptian army and governor of the Sudan. Britain demanded that the Egyptian government withdraw all troops from the Sudan within twenty-four hours, and threatened reprisals, among them that the Sudan would unlimitedly increase the area to be irrigated from the Nile. Though the threat was over-ruled by the British government, it had already served to fortify obsessional but understandable Egyptian anxieties that Britain would go to any lengths in intimidating Egypt, even using the Sudan where necessary to cut off the supply of the vital Nile waters. **It** was during this crisis, when secret orders were being issued in the Sudan to the governors of provinces to evacuate all Egyptians, civil and military alike, that Egyptian army units resisted, and Sudanese army units mutinied in support. These were momentous times in the Sudan. The first Sudanese nationalist document, *The Claims of the Sudanese Nation*, had been written by Ali Abd al-Latif, a former Sudanese army officer of Dinka origin who had been dismissed from the army after a clash with an Egyptian officer. For this subversive document he had been sentenced to a year in prison. The White Flag League had been formed. Throughout the summer of 1924 it held political demonstrations. Cadets of the Military School, carrying their arms, marched through the streets of Khartoum. The most dangerous moment of the mutiny was the advance of men from the Sudanese Ith Battalion towards the Blue Nile bridge at the approach of the capital. A pitched battle ensued against British troops. But the Sudanese were thrown back when promised support, from Egyptian battalions stationed near by, did not materialize. This failure of the Egyptian troops to come to their aid had a traumatic effect on many of the Sudanese army officers, and on civilians, many of whom had been leading advocates of close cooperation with Egypt. Among those irreparably disillusioned was Abdallah Khalil, then a young officer and a member of the newly formed White Flag League, but subsequently one of the most suspicious and bitter opponents of

Egypt – a factor which played no small part in the military hand-over of 1958 that he master-minded.

The assassination of Stack gave Britain the pretext that it needed to exclude Egypt completely from the Sudanese administration and from any responsibility for the government of the Sudan. Britain had at last a free hand, if ever it had felt tied by the letter of the Condominium Agreement, to decide what was good for the Sudan and for British policy in Africa; what might be favourable to Egyptian interests was irrelevant. As for the Sudanese, they were not consulted, only administered; until, when the moment was judged apposite, some measured, short steps were permitted from advisory to legislative council.

Meanwhile, inside Egypt explosive discontents were soon to erupt in the 1952 revolution and an open confrontation with British imperialism. From 1945 onwards, Egypt presented demands to Britain for the evacuation of its forces from the Canal Zone, and for the 'unity of the Nile Valley' (Egypt and the Sudan together) under the Egyptian crown. In October 1946, the Sidky-Bevan Protocol set 1949 as the date for British troops to evacuate Egypt; but it also provided, in the event of war in the region, for joint defence arrangements which contained a clause on the Sudan so ambiguous that it promptly supplied a fresh source of conflict. Britain interpreted the protocol applying to the Sudan as providing for self-government and self-determination, and for only a symbolic association *with* Egypt. The Egyptians read the same thing to mean that the development of Sudanese interests would take place within the relationship of the Sudan and Egypt under the common crown, and interpreted this relationship between the two countries as a firm dynastic union. By 1951 relations with Britain had deteriorated so far that the Egyptian government unilaterally abrogated the 1936 Treaty and the Condominium Agreement itself, to proclaim King Farouk king of Egypt and the Sudan. By now, too, Egypt was on the brink of revolution. And it was at this time that United States and British policy on Egypt and the Sudanese question diverged dramatically and publicly. In the interests of a plan for an Allied Middle East Command, the United States was pressing Britain to make peace with Egypt on virtually any

terms as long as the Canal was secured. Throughout May and June 1952, Eden records, 'at meetings and in despatches, we continued to be urged by the United States government to recognise King Farouk as King of the Sudan.... At one of these discussions I had to say bluntly that we could not keep the Egyptian government alive by feeding the Sudanese to them.'³

Britain's obligations were sharply divided between Foreign Office policy considerations and the pull of the Sudanese administrators. Whitehall alone might have acceded to American pressure and acquiesced in the Egyptian demand; but British administrators in the Sudan were implacably opposed to any union with Egypt. Added to the pull by this lobby of administrators in the field, Britain had a considerably more pessimistic – and accurate – assessment of the chances of rescuing the corrupt Egyptian regime. In July 1952, the seizure of power by Egypt's Free Officers Movement overtook Britain's dilemma, for Cairo rapidly negotiated an agreement for self-government directly with the Sudan's political parties. It introduced a three-year transitional period of self-government before independence, and laid down that the first national elections would be for a parliament which would decide on independence or a form of union with Egypt. Britain could no longer, single-handed, determine the basis of the Sudan's future. In this way, Sudanese independence was due directly to Egypt's own seizure of independence; but its form was still to be shaped by influences from both Egypt and Britain, for by now these contrary and conflicting associations had been built into the Sudan's own politics.

For years after the reconquest of the Sudan, Britain feared that the Mahdist movement, though defeated on the battlefield, would sweep the country once again. A safeguard which, if it had not been present, might have had to be invented for classic divide-and-rule purposes, was at hand. This was the existence, among the religious sects or *tariqa*,* of the Khatmiyya, led by

* Ou the *tariqa* Trimmingham writes in; *Islam in the Sudan*: 'The basic idea underlying the existence of the Tariqas is the belief that the common man, to get salvation, needs the guidance of some person endowed with peculiar spiritual virtue who acts as intermediary between him and the deity. Therefore the heads of the tariqas are in exalted position, obeyed absolutely, and are not merely religious but social leaders of their people.'

the Mirghani family. Between the Khatmiyya and the Mahdists there was implacable rivalry. It was deeply rooted in history, and shrewdly manipulated by the administration.⁴

In the 1880s, when the cry of the Mahdi for a rising against foreign rule in the name of the true faith consolidated the Ansar (the followers of the Mahdi), the Khatmiyya and the Shaigia, a major tribe, far from supporting the forces of the Mahdi, co-operated with the Egyptian army against them.⁵ The Mahdist state sent the Khatmiyya into eclipse. The reconquest restored them and brought home their head, Ali al-Mirghani, who re-entered the Sudan with Kitchener's forces. While the Ansar and the posthumous son of the Mahdi, Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, were kept under tight surveillance, the Khatmiyya were favoured, and their leader Ali al-Mirghani was honoured and promoted.

Then suddenly, with the First World War, Mahdist fortunes changed dramatically, as the needs of Allied strategy over-turned domestic policy in the Sudan. Turkey entered the war against the Allies with a cry to Muslims of the world to rise against their infidel oppressor. This called for a new look at the Mahdists, since they 'were the traditional enemies not only of the Turks, but also of the Egyptians . . . who were held guilty for bringing the British into the Sudan and wrecking the Mahdist regime. . . .' From a Mahdist point of view, therefore, a tactical alliance with the British authorities, who were in any case in control of both the Sudan and Egypt, was for the time being acceptable.⁶

Thus, in an ironic twist hard to equal even in the Sudan's experience of perverse alliances and expediencies, the Ansar, whose armies had martyred Gordon, were turned from Britain's fanatical adversaries into the most dependable allies and, in time, the most expectant wards. Sayed Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi emerged from obscurity and a modest existence in Omdurman on a government pension of £5 per month to settle, at government initiative, at Aba in the Gezira, the birthplace and strong-point of Mahdism. There he gathered his followers about him in flourishing agricultural enterprises, became the wealthiest land-owner in the country and, the Khatmiyya feared, grew ambitious to be crowned king of the Sudan.⁷ The Khatmiyya's deep emotional involvement with Egypt brought them into

ever-increasing friction with Britain's policy of forcing apart the two countries of the Nile, while the interests of government and the Ansar coincided ever more closely, inevitably to increase rivalry between the Khatmiyya and the Ansar themselves.

The greater part of contemporary Sudanese political history turns on the axis of these two opposing sects and their opposite orientations. Political party moves and allegiances, seemingly inexplicable, were a mirror of their conflicts. In its turn, even the unity of the army command was rent by opposing sectarian allegiances. Every government of the traditional parties has had to come to terms with, or break under, the all-pervasive influence of the two major *tariqas*.

As the Sudan developed, the communities of the two major sects began to acquire economic interests and roles which further solidified differences between them. Sayed Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi gathered the Ansar of his father around him on the spreading family estates, combining shrewd economic entrepreneurship with the organization of a tight network of committees that in time of need became a great private army. His support was drawn from the subsistence agricultural sector of the economy and from the tribes of the western Sudan and the south of the Blue Nile province. Organized still on a traditional basis, the tribal leaders were integrated into the administrative hierarchy of indirect rule, and became, through the tax collector, the staff of the native courts and the tribal authorities, the government of the countryside. The Khatmiyya, who drew their support from the Northern province and Kasala, were based mostly on the tribes along the Nile who were settled farmers and became, by contrast, first the village and later the town merchants. These were the first to become integrated in the modern sector of the economy, and who were accordingly first subject to the social ferment that this brought to the town-dwellers.

It was the towns that, as everywhere in Africa, were the birth-place of the independence movement. But, after the defeat of the joint army-civilian rising in 1924, it took time for a new political generation to grow. Disillusionment at Egypt's faltering role led to a long fallow period. Government promoted a system of indirect rule. Armed with Lugard's manuals, it began a

search for 'lost tribes and vanished chiefs'.⁸ Plans for training Sudanese administrators were thrown to the winds. The Military College was closed down, and the army was modelled on the West African field forces, where commissions were granted only to men promoted from the ranks. In the ten years following 1924, no new schools were opened. There was no national political organization, and no direct political action.

In February 1938 the Graduates' General Congress was founded. (Graduates were those who had completed studies at Gordon College or an intermediate school.) At first it occupied itself with social and educational affairs. The intention, declared a letter to the governor, 'was not in any way to embarrass the government . . . nor to pursue lines of activity incompatible with government policy. . . . Most of us are government officials, fully conscious of our obligations as such.'⁹ But in 1947 the Graduates' Congress set out twelve post-war demands. The rebuke of the Civil Secretary, Sir Douglas Newbold, must be hard to equal in its brusque rejection of independence aspirations. Congress had forfeited the confidence of government by the very act of submitting the memorandum, he scolded. The memorandum was returned forthwith. The claim of the Congress to speak in the name of the Sudanese people was especially presumptuous; Congress had to realize that it was the duty and the business of the government alone to decide the pace of development. No sooner had Newbold snubbed the Congress than he was informed 'deviously'¹⁰ that a delegation of 'moderates' craved an interview to prevent an impasse. He received and encouraged them.

Newbold's handling of the Graduates' Congress had important consequences. His blunt rejection of the claims by Congress to speak for the Sudanese drove political leaders to the easiest means of creating a mass movement, a call on the support of the religious *tariqa*\$.¹¹ The government tactic of opening private consultations with moderates caused a split into at least two distinct parties. In 1943 Ismail al-Azhari formed the Ashiqqa (Brothers); and the opposing side founded the Umma (Nation). The Ashiqqa had close connexions with the Khatmiyya, and the Umma with the Ansar, the second especially through the

patronage of Sayed Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi. The old dynastic rivalries and religious disputes were rejuvenated. The Graduates' Congress had been an attempt to create a non-sectarian nationalist movement and might have broken from the sects. It came to be racked on the identical issues and along almost the identical lines that divided them.

Through an Advisory Council and a Legislative Council, the government tried to counter the claims of the political groups. The Umma Party took part in elections; the Ashiqqa boycotted these bodies as mere talking shops. But though the Umma Party was inclined to cooperate with the administration in paced constitutional changes, that *amity* was severely jolted when Britain re-opened negotiations with Egypt over the Canal; it was apparent to the most pro-British groups that the Canal came before the Sudan. Fear of a deal between Britain and Egypt put the spur behind Umma pressures for self-government. Soon only the tribal chiefs in the Legislative Assembly were committed to continuing British overlordship. The Ashiqqa groups looked to Egypt as an ally to displace Britain. The Umma Party pressed for self-government as the first step to independence; its slogan was Sudan for the Sudanese.

New forces came forward to demand an all-party provisional government that would organize elections for a Sudanese Constituent Assembly independent of both Britain and Egypt. Chief among them was the Workers' Trade Union Federation. Organized labour in the Sudan was fired from the outset by a combination of trade-union and political demands.¹² The first conference of the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation held in 1951 demanded the immediate evacuation of all imperialist forces and self-determination for the Sudan. Out of this conference and this demand, rose the United Front for the Liberation of the Sudan. It comprised the Federation's affiliated unions, workers' committees and sections of the nationalist movement. Workers' clubs had been formed as far back as 1934 in Atbara and Khartoum. Then, during the war, when without supplies from the Sudan there would have been no Middle East war effort, the unions achieved a national and militant character. Between 1939 and 1953, the number of railway workers alone

increased by 10,000 to 25,000. In 1946 the tenants of the Gezira scheme, the foundation of the Sudanese economy, went on strike, all 25,000 of them. On the railways, a management trying to improvise schemes for joint advisory committees found itself bombarded with petitions from workers demanding fully-fledged unions. Fobbed off by the railways management, the workers decided to operate over its head. Within a year, after illegal demonstrations and a strike lasting ten days – which spread from Atbara, the railwaymen's town and birthplace of the labour movement, to Khartoum and Port Sudan – and with the backing of both the political fronts, the railway workers had won recognition. The Sudan's trade unions were quick to draw the conclusion that militancy and strikes were the weapons to use, and that the place of the unions was alongside the political movements. By 1952 the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation was organizing peasant cultivators and the share-croppers of Gezira whose landlord was the government. By 1951 there were forty-one unions in existence, although wage-earners constituted only 2 per cent or less of the total population. and wage-earning was largely seasonal. The entry of the unions marked the beginning of popular politics in the Sudan, and gave the political movement new and hopeful dimensions, though it was some time before attempts were made to realize them.

Britain tried diluting pressures for immediate self-government by encouraging the Khatmiyya against the Ansar; and for a while there appeared a last refuge in a new Republican Socialist Party, composed mostly of tribal sheikhs and chiefs. But suddenly a Cairo agreement for self-government was a *fait accompli*, negotiated by Egypt directly with the Sudan's political parties.

In the first elections for a Parliament to decide on the shape of the future – independence or a link with Egypt – the National Unionist Party, which was a combination of the Ashiqqa and other pro-Egyptian unionist groups, emerged victorious with fifty-one of the ninety-seven seats in the lower house; and Ismail al-Azhari became the first prime minister. The Umma Party accused Egypt of interfering in the elections on the side of the NUP; the NUP counter-charged that Britain had interfered

in the countryside on the side of the Umma Party. The Umma Party had for too long been too closely identified with the British administration to expect to win the elections; but no parliamentary convention could contain Umma chagrin at defeat, and its anxiety about Azhari's oft-proclaimed pro-Egyptian intentions. When, among other heads of state, General Neguib arrived in Khartoum for the opening of Parliament, some 40,000 Ansar arrived by train and steamer, on camels, horseback and on foot, armed with swords and broad-bladed spears, and waving the black-and-red flag of the Mahdia, to besiege the airport, the streets of the capital and the palace, so that Neguib might hear 'the voice of independence'. Rioting and street clashes forced the postponement of Parliament and the declaration of a state of emergency in Khartoum. This was not the first time the Umma Party had mobilized its private army to besiege the capital and intimidate the *avant-garde* of the towns into compliance with the outlook of the less advanced countryside.

Independence or a link with Egypt? This old battle issue looked like causing political explosion. The Ansar-threatened state of insurrection was a sharp portent of how far the Umma Party was prepared to go in sabotaging any association with Egypt. Yet already the old alternatives had an emaciated air about them. The call for unity with Egypt had been forged as the lever with which to displace British control; but now the lever had done its work, formally at least. The cry of 'the Sudan for the Sudanese' had been a Mahdist slogan, and highly suspect to those who saw it as a cover for continued British supervision; but when the country was self-governing, the slogan expressed the patriotic surge towards full independence. Azhari's formulations of his association-with-Egypt policy had, in any event, grown progressively less precise, in line with a general NUP inability or unwillingness to shape a consistent policy. To the educated in the towns; to the new radical forces of the trade unions and the Gezira tenants' committees; to those secular political forces that Azhari banked on so heavily for his authority, the advocacy of a link with Egypt was no longer necessary to assert the full independence of the Sudan. Azhari accordingly adapted his policy. By the time that the vote on

the independence issue was taken in Parliament, there was unanimity in favour. The NUP and Umma Party voted together; and it was Azhari, formerly the leading advocate of Nile Valley unity, who emerged as the prime minister of the independent Sudan in 1956, after short-circuiting the procedural provisions laid down for a transitional period.

After decades of manipulation under contending masters, the about-face on the independence issue was necessary and inevitable. But the NUP could not easily survive the absence of a policy once the unifying issue of association with Egypt was gone; while Azhari's habit of switching policies and partners was to become endemic in his own behaviour, as in that of politicians generally, to make party political behaviour a bewildering series of contradictory and aimless postures in office. Splits in the NUP broke through the paper plastered over them at Cairo in 1952, and spread in several directions. Such splits were indicative of a growing decline in Azhari's prestige, and above all resulted from the total absence of a unifying policy for independence within the governing party or the country. This deficiency was underlined with great urgency by the outbreak in August 1955 of mutiny in the South, in the Equatoria Corps of the Sudan Defence Force.

Only in 1946 had the notion been abandoned of joining the South of the Sudan with East Africa. It was then in the interests of British policy to unite the two halves of the country and to stress the rights of self-determination for the whole Sudanese people, non-Arabs and non-Moslems included, as counter to the claims by Egypt that the peoples of the Nile Valley should unite. The South had long been indoctrinated, however, to believe that its future did not lie with the Arab North. When it knew that independence was coming, and saw what a paltry share of the British-relinquished civil service posts it was likely to get, there was a last desperate attempt to draw attention forcibly to its grievances. Northerners, principally traders and administrators, living in the South were massacred. The Azhari government retaliated by executing 300 of the army mutineers. Later in the year, when Parliament discussed the declaration of independence, it resolved that the claims of the South were to

be given full consideration by the Constituent Assembly; but Southerners were never satisfied that this was done.

Meanwhile Azhari himself was becoming estranged from the leadership of the Khatmiyya sect. Despite his call for secular politics, said his critics, he behaved as though he were promoting a third *neo-tariqa*, with himself as leader and patron, and his followers as the faithful believers in his mission, vague as this was in the absence of any social, political or economic programme for the country. By mid-1956 Azhari had lost the premiership; and the patronage of the Khatmiyya was now bestowed on a new party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (the PDP), founded by Mirghani Hamza with the publicly declared support of Sayed Ali al-Mirghani.

The Sudan's next government was a grotesque expedient. The Umma Party, finding itself twenty-five seats short of an absolute majority, formed a coalition with the PDP. Between them these ill-suited partners, headed by Abdallah Khalil, ousted Azhari and what was left of the NUP after the formation of the new Khatmiyya-based party. No coalition could have been more anomalous at this time. The PDP looked to Egypt as the leader of the Arab world in the struggle against British policy in the Middle East. It turned further and further leftwards as Egypt's national revolution promoted the seizure of the Suez Canal, large-scale nationalization and Soviet aid and association. To the Umma Party, Egypt was anathema. The Umma association with Britain was intimate and cultivated. The PDP shadowed the nuances of Egyptian foreign policy. The Umma Party felt itself to be of the West, protected by the West's policy for the containment of Egypt. The PDP suspected the Umma Party of aiming to make Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi life-president of the Sudan. The Umma Party was alert for every intrigue that might elevate the status of Ali al-Mirghani. Nothing brought this coalition together but their common rejection of Azhari and their ambition for office. Their partnership in government was locked in tension and complete incompatibility of policy. Indeed, the politicians grew nimble at making incompatibles sound plausible and necessary. But meanwhile the government could agree on only the most trivial issues. Ministers

of one party ordained policies in their ministries that were challenged, reversed or nullified by their ministerial deputies of the coalition partner. When the political crisis arrived, security chiefs were given contradictory orders by Umma and PDP leaders, jointly responsible for government but tearing it apart in their conflict of purpose.

The crisis itself was precipitated by the Eisenhower doctrine.

In 1957 the United States sent Vice-President Nixon on a goodwill tour of African countries. The day after successful negotiations in Ethiopia for American port facilities and an air base in exchange for American aid to the Ethiopian air force, Mr Nixon was in Khartoum, telling the Sudan's prime minister and foreign minister that United States aid under the Eisenhower doctrine was designed to strengthen the independence of new nations. Prime Minister Abdallah Khalil, according to the press reports of the day, made no firm commitment, but emphasized that the Sudan would welcome assistance as long as it placed no limit on Sudanese sovereignty.

Five months later, the United States' president's special assistant on Middle East problems, Mr James P. Richards, who was in the Middle East to give the Eisenhower doctrine a stronger push, announced that he had managed to give out \$rzo million – half of it in economic aid – which had already brought vast relief to countries of the area, 'especially those on the borders of the Soviet bloc, and *especially to responsible military men*' (my emphasis).^{1 3}

The Suez invasion a year earlier had been intended to bring the Nasser regime to its knees. It had had entirely the opposite effect in Egypt and the Arab world. It ushered in the Iraq revolution and the union of Egypt and Syria. Those that joined the American crusade against Communism in exchange for aid were those regimes apprehensive of their own survival in the wave of enthusiasm for militant Nasserism. In the Lebanon, in July 1958, 8,000 U.S. marines landed, less perhaps for Lebanese reasons than as a warning against the coup d'etat in Baghdad, where the Iraqi government had been overthrown for its pro-West policy.

The landing took place as the Sudanese Parliament was in the

The Failure of Politics

throes of an acrimonious debate over American aid to the Sudan. It did nothing to calm apprehensions. Nor did Parliament's knowledge that, even while it was debating the Aid Bill, the governments of the Sudan and the United States were engaged in correspondence about an agreement already signed. Furthermore, the prime minister and the Umma Party were known to be giving a sympathetic reception to US proposals for strategic facilities alongside the Red Sea.

Alone of all the countries in Africa and the Middle East pressed to receive the Eisenhower doctrine, the Sudan had expressed reservations. It had decided to postpone a decision 'pending further study'. But this study, and the argument raging around it, had been interrupted by a sudden sharp confrontation with Egypt over three border areas lying near the 22nd parallel, among them a large triangular area bounded on the east by the Red Sea and which included the fishing village of Halayib. (The dispute had its roots in the administrative arrangements of the Condominium.) Troop movements had taken place on both sides of the border, and the issue had been argued before the Security Council. This frontier dispute had dominated the elections which followed; and the ruling Umma-PDP coalition had again been returned. The NUP's defeat was attributed to the frontier dispute with Egypt; Sudanese-Egyptian relations had been rubbed raw once again.

In the new Cabinet, the Umma Party held the major portfolios. And barely a week after the new Cabinet had been sworn in, the Council of Ministers approved and signed an agreement for United States economic and technical aid to the Sudan.* The United States, said the Minister of Finance, had made it clear that the assistance was being extended to economically backward countries, to raise their standard of living as the best safeguard against the spread of international Communism. 'I believe that the agreement does not in any way conflict with the full freedom of our country, infringe its sovereignty, or bind it with any conditions.'

Yahia al Fadli led the opposition attack in Parliament. The

*The Sudan-United States of America Economics Development Co-operation Agreement (Ratification) Bill 1958.

Sudan, he said, had struggled to get its independence without being tied to any pacts or treaties. There were now two alternative courses : to join liberal countries in their struggle for the freedom of Africa; or to lose independence through 'imperialist tricks'. Imperialism was aware that the Sudan was the link between the African belt and the Middle East countries working for the liberation of Africa. The Eisenhower doctrine was meant to fill the vacuum in the Middle East after the disappearance of British and French influence. Had it not been for strong opposition even inside the Council of Ministers, the Sudan might have been prevailed upon to accept the Eisenhower doctrine under the same conditions as Jordan and the Lebanon. That battle lost, the attempt was now being made to bring United States influence in through another door.

Several attempts to adjourn the debate, and with it the Bill, were defeated. The fight went on in committee, with NUP speakers charging that the United States was hoping to find petrol, uranium and copper on the Red Sea coast; that the Americans were interested in the Sudan for its strategic importance; and that a motion during the previous Parliament for the recognition of Peoples' China had been rejected under American pressure. NUP efforts inside Parliament for the rejection of the Bill were followed by a move to stop the government from adjourning the House, on the grounds that this was a time of crisis in the Middle East. The motion for dissolution was passed, however, with a government spokesman felicitously assuring the country that alleged differences in the government were 'no such thing . . . but only a serious search for reality'.¹⁴

Search or not, the reality was that, while the PDP left it to the NUP to voice opposition, on such issues as US aid, in the House, it was operating an undeclared policy of non-cooperation in the Council of Ministers and in the ministries : breaking quorums; absenting itself from crucial government business; being party to government decisions one day and attacking them in the press on the next. The country was in a state of ferment, both because of the controversy over United States aid and because of the economic crisis. The reserves had dwindled to an all-time low, from £62 million to £8 million, and the country's

The Failure of Politics

adverse trade balance was mounting. The 1957 cotton crop had been a poor one and was as yet unsold in the world market, where cotton prices were falling. Severe exchange control and import restrictions had hit the townspeople and the trading classes, already fiercely disillusioned with the ineptitudes of politicians and parties, and especially with a Parliament dominated by career politicians, chiefs, merchants and former civil servants, which showed itself patently unable to tackle the country's financial crisis, but which nevertheless debated the raising of parliamentary salaries from £55 to £120 per month.¹⁵

By the time that Parliament adjourned, the crisis had spread to the streets. A strike of twenty-four unions, led by the Sudanese Trade Union Federation, brought about an almost total stoppage and the arrest of many demonstrators, including secondary-school pupils. A press conference called by the director of the American aid scheme had to be called off at the last minute for fear of demonstrations, and the American ambassador was mobbed in the street. As a security precaution, all demonstrations were banned. This was, at least, a reprieve for a police and security apparatus harassed by the contradictory orders that issued from the rival factions in government. A senior police officer recounted his dilemma.¹⁶ "The Prime Minister telephoned me on one occasion. "Why are you sitting at your desk while demonstrators are shouting at me in the streets?" he demanded. I had to reply, "My Minister [the Minister of Interior was the leader of the PDP] told me to stay in my office."

Meanwhile, army security was known to be visiting regional commands to check on security in the provinces. The campaign against United States aid looked like the issue about to break the back of the crippled coalition. A frantic scuffle for party re-alignments began. Faced with a disintegrating Cabinet, the prime minister tried to prevail on the Speaker and the courts to postpone the reopening of Parliament; but on 11 November the Speaker announced that Parliament would reopen on 17 November. Then, once again, presumably, it would be locked in battle over United States aid, as well as the thorny negotiations with Egypt over the Nile waters, and the economic crisis by now further than ever from relief.

THE ARMY DIVIDED

The army had shown a deep rift a month before the first independence coalition government was formed. In June 1957, a report in *El Rai El Amm* shook the country. 'Arrest of High Officers Preparing Secret Organisation in the Army,' it said, and announced the arrest of thirty-four-year-old Major Abdel Kibaida Rahman of the Signal Corps, recently returned from a study course in England, whose secret activities in the army had been under the scrutiny of army headquarters for some time. Three days later, it was reported that six officers and four non-commissioned officers, as well as five students of the military college, were under arrest. Further arrests were expected within forty-eight hours, among them those of high-ranking colonels. The army command had in its possession a plan of action for seizing control of the army and then the government. A fortnight later, all those arrested were released, except for three officers and three military school cadets, accused of inciting a mutiny and using the army to stage a coup. These were brought to trial before a military court.

The prosecution charged a conspiracy to establish an army revolutionary council and a government of second-ranking politicians, since the first-rankers had disqualified themselves, by 1957, through their year-old independence record. The projected coup was described to the court. Three detachments were to have been used – one for the radio station, one to round up government ministers, and a third to arrest the head of government – after which a press conference would have been held, and contact made with foreign embassies. Administrative and police officers had allegedly promised to make key arrests. The leading members of the new Cabinet would have included Ahmed Heir, the disaffected NUP leader, and Mirghani Hamza, a PDP minister. It had been planned to make Brigadier Abu Bakr, of the northern Shendi command, commander-in-chief in place of General Abboud.

Kibaida and Omar Khalafalla were sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment; Sergeant Mohammed al-Tayyib to fourteen years'; military college student Babiker Awad to ten years'; and two others to seven years' each. None of the men served his full

term. Not long afterwards, the Sudan was taken over by a military junta, and this released the young coup-planners, as though the imprisonment of such was a corrective that army men in office preferred to do without. Two of the men involved in the Kibaida trial were subsequently involved in a later coup attempt, one of three internal army convulsions under the Sudan's military regime.

The Sudanese army was thus split even before the junta took power. The divisions in the army corresponded closely with political, sect and community divisions in the Sudan. The junior and middle officers identified vigorously not only with the nationalist aspirations of the young men in the towns disgusted at the antics of the politicians, but also with Egypt's Free Officers, who had made the independence revolution in their country. The army command – then – had identified with the politicians in power.

Nigeria: The Juicy Morsel

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my heart. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you – as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune had placed in his mouth.

Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People*

When, in 1914, Nigeria was constituted a single political unit, the only bond of political unity was the person of Lugard, the governor-general. The only occasions on which the higher officials of two separate bureaucracies, one in the North, and the other in the South, could meet was at the annual session of the

Legislative Council in Lagos. For all the formal act of unification, Nigeria was still run as two colonies. Two distinct administrative centres of power were built: one in Kaduna, the other in Lagos. A frequently heard quip was that if all the Africans were to leave Nigeria, the Southern and Northern administrations could go to war.¹ In administration, in land policy, in a dozen different fields of colonial government, the administration reinforced not the unity of the colony, but the differences between North and South. For a quarter of a century, from 1922 to 1947, there was no representative political structure of any sort that brought the regions together.

In the North, the colonial administration took over intact the system of centralized political power and patronage presided over by the emirs, and used *it* to rule and collect taxes. In return for helping the British to keep order, the Northern ruling group retained its privileges and was insulated from unsettling influences. In the development of a cash economy and the production of crops for export, the North limped far behind the rest of the country. Social change and Western education came last and least to the North. **I**t was the last region to train its own civil service. Until the 1950s, the North had no vocal and aggrieved educated group; the first, and for some years the only, educated Northerners were the sons of titled families and high-ranking officials whose place in the social hierarchy was assured. Commoners, or *talakawa*, seemed inert under the heavy weight of dynastic, religious and economic overlordship. Rulers were born to wealth, and the ruled to subservience.

Government worked through the Native Authority system, which was embedded in the rigidly stratified social system. And when politics at last started in the North, the traditional elements of authority, government and party were virtually indistinguishable. Of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) representatives who sat in the 1959 Federal House of Representatives, one in five was the son of a ruling emir; one in ten was a district administrative head; and seven in ten were Native Authority councillors and officials.² When an opposition party did develop (the Northern Elements Progressive Union, known as NEPU), its leadership was drawn from the lower strata in the society:

traders, small farmers and independent craftsmen like tailors, butchers, dyers and tanners.³ But because government and party were impossible to disentangle, opposition to the NPC was construed as opposition to the Native Authorities, to the traditional social system, and to establishment Islam itself. There were, in any event, decided economic advantages in supporting the system and the party in power. Emirs, chiefs, district heads, Native Authority councillors, regional and federal legislators were the men who dominated the provincial loan boards and the Northern Nigerian Development Board. Credit followed the flag.

The North started to manipulate politics for business later than the South, because an already entrenched leadership, with traditional sources of wealth and patronage, assumed power. Yet it took only a few years for the familiar process, of manipulating government and politics for economic ends, to unfold. The probe into the Northern spoils system ordered after the January coup⁴ disclosed how the traditional aristocracy was beginning to build a new economic base in large modern farms, contracting and real estate. A scrutiny of thirty-nine investment and loan projects of the Northern Nigeria Development Corporation showed that the biggest borrowers had been the big men of the government; and that a word from a minister, above all from the Northern premier, had been enough to over-ride the law and the decisions of the Board.

In the South, the colonial administration had made a futile attempt to impose indirect rule; but traditional authority, status and wealth had been overtaken by and integrated with new forces, thrown up by trade and business, economic and social ferment. New classes of entrepreneurs had arisen; of cocoa and rubber farmers, and growers of other export crops; of produce-buyers, traders, lorry-owners, money-lenders. Side by side with them had emerged the clerks, the artisans and the labourers in the employ of the large export-houses, government, transport and trade. Each year thousands of school-leavers besieged the labour market, in the main unsuccessfully; and these young men, led by the thrustful middle classes of trade and the professions—especially the lawyers in Lagos and the Southern towns, groomed in the manners of British law and politics – put

the steam behind a rising Southern demand for entry to the political kingdom.

The political parties of the South were built by the aggressive new men of education and money-making. First on the scene was the NCNC. Led by Nmandi Azikiwe, the party dominated Southern politics in both East and West until 1951 and the rise of the Action Group, led by Chief Obaferni Awolowo. Elections were in the offing that year, and there was a prospect of power in the West for a party that could capture the political initiative from the NCNC. The Action Group capitalized on the alliance – already promoted in the pan-Yoruba cultural movement, or Egbe Orno Odudwa – between the traditional leadership of the Obas and chiefs, and the business, professional and educated classes. The leadership of the two Southern parties rose from the same springs of business and professional activity.⁵

In the post-war period, buoyant prices for export crops accelerated enormously the expansion of the farming, trading and business class. Marketing boards, set up to sell export crops at higher prices than those paid to the producer, spawned shoals of new African agents and produce-buyers. The boards also accumulated handsome surpluses which, in 1954, were distributed among the three regional marketing boards, according to the principle of derivation. It was these regional marketing boards that provided the funds for the party in office to dispense patronage and so reinforce itself in power, to manipulate government resources for the benefit of its own political class. Banks were established to break the expatriate monopoly on banking, and development corporations and loan boards set up to supply government capital for development projects in the region. The first hue and cry over the spoils system was raised about the activities, in the Eastern Region, of Dr Azikiwe, the African Continental Bank and the financial and business empire on which the NCNC was built.⁶ A government commission laid bare the Nigerian mixture of primitive accumulation and Tammany Hall activity. Not many years later the same pattern was revealed in the Western Region.⁷ The parties were part of rival business and financial structures which existed to make

money for the individuals concerned, and to provide backing for the parties,' wrote Ken Post.⁸ The politicians of each region were entrenching themselves by the acquisition of economic interests. At the same time, the political parties that spawned these politicians were consolidating the political control that they had won in their respective regions, and using it to finance their next bids for power, at the centre.

Successive colonial constitutions devised for Nigeria entrenched political power on regional lines. By 1952, there was an NP C government in the North, an Action government in the West, and an NCNC government in the East. In the boom of the 1950s, regional political power was being fortified by economic engagement: largest and most prosperous in the West; catching up fast in the East; and growing more slowly in the North, but embedded there in the traditional social order. Government in Nigeria rested on a tripod of three regions, with the legs of uneven length and fashioning. The time was approaching when a more solid support had to be provided. What was the design to be? From 1951 to 1958 Britain had allowed the Northern demand for half the seats in the Federal House. The 1958 Constitutional Conference rocked this pre-independence balance of control between South and North. With Nigeria about to be launched towards independence, the old British pledge to 'protect' the North – and use it as ballast for conservatism in the old state – had to be honoured. The Federal Parliament, it was laid down, would be elected on the basis of the population figures. The North, with over half Nigeria's population, was thus guaranteed cast-iron political domination of the country.

Thus, at the time of independence, two heirs shared the estate, but they were unequally treated in the will. The favoured child was the traditional ruling oligarchy of the North; the less favoured, the Southern business-political class. The constitutional allocation of power, as Sklar has pointed out,⁹ weighted political control in favour of the numerically preponderant, more backward North; in favour of the rural, tied peasantry, as against the urban wage-earners. The region that had achieved self-government last, and had even tried to hold back the date

of independence, emerged as the controlling force of the most populous independent state in Africa.

This major divide between South and North – the first, commercially competitive and beginning to industrialize; the second, under the control of an agrarian oligarchy – looked like possessing the potential of an American civil war. But the ultimate contradiction implicit in the economic cleavage did not become determinant in Nigerian politics. The North-South antagonism glimmered and flared, subsided and flamed again from time to time; but the polarities did not remain constant. East, West and North threw up fresh combinations and conflicts. When the political system broke down altogether over the sharing of spoils, and when civil war finally came, it was not between North and South, but followed a different line-up of forces. This line-up may well have looked unlikely from the pre-independence viewpoint; but it developed with cruel logic across six years, in which the political classes of the three regions ground the faces of their competitors in order to get control of the Federation.

From 1958, when the North's electoral dominance was written into the Federal constitution, economic power also swung from the regions to the central government.¹⁰ Buoyant market prices had built regional prosperity; but falling prices for exports, and the rapacity of the political class, began to drain regional reserves and force the regions themselves to turn for aid to the centre. A new banking act gave the Federal government control over the operation of the regional marketing boards, and, through them, the financial policies of the regional governments.

The Six Year Development Plan for 1962-8 placed the main initiative for economic growth with the Federal government. The system of revenue distribution to the regions was governed by formulae devised at the centre. And the North controlled the centre.

Faced with the problem of how to operate within a federal system which the North could dominate even when they combined, the Southern parties and politicians were reduced to one of two courses. They could campaign in the North to try and break the NPC monolith, or they could combine with it in the

exercise of power. Both courses were tried by one or other of the Southern parties, in a bewildering and wilful round of political compromise, shifting allegiance and incompatible coalitions. Nigerian politics came to be consistent only in inconsistency.

The first engagement in the struggle for control of the political centre and, with it, for sources of national profit and patronage, was fought in the second Federal election of 1959. Both the Action Group and the NCNC subsidized minority parties in the North. The Action Group and the NEPU between them won just under a sixth of the Northern seats from the NPC. This meant that while the NPC was still the largest party, it had to combine with one of the Southern parties to form an effective government: unless, that is, a Southern coalition crystallized. Tortuous and double-dealing negotiations ensued. The NCNC, the oldest independence movement, was determined to achieve a share of federal power, whatever the cost. The Action Group approached the NCNC with proposals for an alliance; but, Dr Azikiwe learned, the same offer had been made to the NPC.^{11*} Relations between the Action Group and the NCNC, as between the Western and Eastern political classes, had been strained in early clashes over the control of the political movement, and in the competition for vantage points in the Federal civil service and the economy. In any event, it was obvious to the NCNC that a coalition which included the NPC would be best favoured by the Colonial Office; indeed, as soon as the election results showed that no party had secured an overall majority, the governor had called on Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the leader of the NPC as the largest party, to form the government. Dr Azikiwe decided, therefore, on an NCNC alliance with the NPC, in a display of opportunism that set a precedent for all Nigerian politics.

Reduced to devising a strategy for effective opposition that promised some real prospect of power, Chief Awolowo switched from a policy of welfare statism to 'democratic socialism'; and the Action Group bent harder to the task, begun in the North

* In *Nigeria's Government and Politics*, John P. Mackintosh *et al.* said that some years later Chief Awolowo claimed that that Action Group deputation to the Sardauna had gone without his knowledge.

with the challenge to the NP C in the Federal election, of appealing across regional barriers to the dispossessed of any region or community. This made Awolowo the target not only of both partners in the Federal government, since he campaigned for minority states in both their territorial preserves, but also of the conservative business elements within his own party, which were led by Chief Akintola, the deputy leader. The Akintola group's policy was directed to a settlement with the Federal government based on the old principle of regional security, which meant a tacit agreement that each party would be left to control its own region undisturbed. Akintola calculated on Balewa's acceptance of a national triangular coalition on this basis. Such a pact could, however, have allowed no room for Awolowo himself, and certainly not in the role he coveted as premier of the Federation. The split inside the Action Group widened with deepening ideological (the Akintola group was alienated by all the talk of democratic socialism), internal party and personal disputes. At the party's annual conference in 1962, a majority of official posts went to Awolowo supporters, and his policies prevailed.

The conflict was suddenly carried dramatically from party to government. The Awolowo wing appointed a leader of the Western Assembly in place of Akintola. The first meeting of the House ended in disorder when an Akintola supporter jumped on a table to shout 'There is fire on the mountain'. Police arrived with 'a fine impartiality in using tear gas to clear the whole Chamber rather than remove the disorderly elements'.¹² The Federal government immediately declared a state of emergency and imposed its own Administrator and emergency rule on the region. By the end of this period, the Awolowo group was in restriction, and the Akintola group, swollen by fair-weather elements of the party as well as by NCNC MPs who crossed when Akintola conceded them several ministries, was in office. A minority government was installed in the region: without elections; and virtually by parliamentary coup, with the collusion of the Federal government. And this minority government now settled down to dismantle the structure of Action Group power in the West. The Coker Commission probed the complex Action

The Failure of Politics

Group business and political network, though the Akintola group, once in power, proceeded to use politics for business in an even more flagrant way.

Next spectacular development in the region was the treason trial against Awolowo and other Action Group leaders, on a charge of plotting to overthrow the Federal government. Awolowo, it was alleged, had lost confidence in elections and had set up within the party an inner Tactical Committee to train men in Ghana and import arms from there. The plot was to take Lagos at two o'clock one morning, with a few pistols and torches, and without any supporting action in the region. Was it an Action Group plot; or one improvised by a small group in the party? The defence argued that although military preparations had, indeed, been undertaken, this had been for self-defence against the strong-arm methods of the Akintola government. After a nine-month trial, in which most of the incriminating evidence came from accomplices turned state's witness, all but four of the twenty-five accused were found guilty. Awolowo's ten-year prison sentence proved to be not the prevention of political violence in the West, but its provocation.

Constitutionalism, the idol of the independence generation of politicians, cracked on its pedestal only two years after the inauguration of independence, when the Federal government used its control of the centre to crush an opposition regional government. A state of emergency was arbitrarily imposed though no emergency existed. And when, a few years later, again in the West, an emergency did, patently, exist, the Federal government refused to invoke its constitutional powers against the minority government that was its political ally, even though that government had been reduced to rule by open violence.

In the North, in fact, the NPC was having to call in the army to subdue its own turbulent opposition. The independence constitution had been a majority party settlement, based on the hegemony of the Fulani-Hausa of the North, the Ibo of the East and the Yoruba of the West. In each region, there were minority peoples in opposition to the main parties; but between them, the dominant parties and the Colonial Office had contrived to brush their claims aside. In the North, of course, NPC power

was entrenched through the administration. But it never carried with it the Tiv people of the Middle Belt, who clamoured for a separate state. Their United Middle Belt Congress, led by Joseph Tarka, fought elections in alliance with the Action Group and won local landslide victories. The NPC used its control of the regional ministries and the Native Authorities to cut Tiv country off from amenities; to drag opponents through the courts on trumped-up charges; to dismiss U MBC supporters from employment and to bar them from trade. In 1960 there was a 'collective paroxysm of anger',¹³ during which armed groups took part in mass arson, and the army had to be used. In 1964 there was an even more serious rising, which the army just managed to quell. Tiv power came into its own only after the collapse of the Federal government, in the wake of the 1966 coup. The two large-scale army interventions in Tiv country, with the rapid decline into chaos of government in the West, were crucial flashpoints for the young officers' coup of 1966.

In the first set of Federal elections of 1959, 'there was no conflict of principles, nor were there any rules of the game'.¹⁴ New-style politicians of the South (in the NCNC) elected to go into partnership with old-style rulers of the North. Differences between them were reconcilable in the interests of sharing power. The next major battle for power at the centre was fought out during the 1964 Federal elections; principles and rules were, again, not discernible; but antagonisms created in the struggle for power now caused a deep crisis of government at the centre.

The NCNC had gone into coalition with the NPC to assert what it had hoped were its superior political and business talents over the 'backward' North. Instead, it found itself outmanoeuvred all along the line. By 1964, indeed, it was in danger of being displaced as a coalition partner by Akintola's government in the West, which the NCNC, ironically, as the NPC's partner at the centre, had helped install by parliamentary coup. When the Western section of the NCNC party organization split off to join Akintola and help him form a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party or NNDP, the NPC had found its new federal ally. By the time that the election approached, therefore, the NPC-NCNC coalition was in shreds.

The lines for battle were drawn in the quarrel over the census. The great hope of the South was that it had outstripped the North in population and would automatically get a larger share of the seats in Parliament. The preliminary returns showed exactly this. But a recount, after a storm of accusations about inflated figures, gave the North the same share of the total population as in 1952. It also showed in all regions a population increase so great as to defy biological possibilities, for this time all the regions had inflated their figures! The NCNC called for yet another census. The NPC rejected the demand flatly, and was supported by the NNDP.

Two new alliances formed for the fight over the constituencies. On the one side, there was the NPC with the NNDP and some minor Southern parties, in the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA); on the other, the United Progressive Grand Alliance, or UPGA, composed of the NCNC, the Action Group and the opposition parties of the North, NEPU and the UMBC. A few months of campaigning drained UPGA of any confidence that it could win, a slight enough eventuality in the first place, in view of the grip that the NPC held on the Northern constituencies, and its vigorous intimidation of opposition candidates.¹⁵ In the West elections were fought in what was a state of incipient civil war, with thugs hired by both sides and mounting casualty lists. Beaten back from one constituency after another in the North, and charging bias and improper pressure against its candidates in the West, UPGA called for a postponement of the election. UPGA's lawyers and politicians had hit on a stratagem which they thought would hand them the initiative: if elections were postponed, they reasoned, there would be no lawfully constituted Parliament; and the president, Dr Azikiwe, the last repository of NCNC power at the centre, could assume executive powers in place of the premier, a Northerner.

The UPGA boycott of the elections, announced as the country was already going to the polls, swept a huge majority into the hands of the NNA, and threw the next move to Dr Azikiwe. He had prepared a dawn broadcast that throbbed with vibrant martyred phrases. "The independence of Nigeria was

like a flame that consumed my political ambition.... I would rather resign, than call upon any person to form a government. . . . This should release my conscience from the chains of power politics....' The text of the speech was released to the press, but Azikiwe never delivered it; his nerve failed in characteristic fashion during the five-day deadlock that ensued. In the end he announced his decision to reappoint Balewa as prime minister after all – 'in the interests of national unity'. State House in Lagos had been the scene of an attempt by the UPGA leaders to get the heads of the army, the navy and the police to concede their constitutional allegiance to the president, and not to the prime minister. The army declined; its view of its constitutional position was strongly influenced by British High Commission advice. When this constitutional stratagem to use the army failed, Azikiwe's resolve melted, and he called in the police to protect him from his own supporters: UPGA leaders, and the Lagos populace, and not least the principal spirits behind the general strike of a few months earlier, who were incensed by this ignominious retreat from the planned trial of strength. Criticism of the policies pursued by Azikiwe's generation of politicians rumbled among the younger radicals of the South, but it found no organized form. As for UPGA, it had been roundly defeated twice over; in farcical elections; and in a devious legal stratagem, which had tried to manipulate the constitution, but had taken good care not to defy it. For the UPGA politicians had considerable stakes to secure: they were not eager to share Awolowo's sojourn in prison, and there were always fresh rounds of political bargaining in the offing.

Only on one occasion, not long before the Federal election, had the initiative been taken from the quarrelling political class and been given to the urban masses. This was the occasion of the general strike, in June 1964. The government had set up a commission to review wages; but when months went by and no recommendations were announced, various small and previously disunited unions set up the Joint Action Committee and called a general strike. More than a wage strike, this was a symptom of the popular discontent in the towns with the politicians and the political system, and the growing frustration among workers

and the unemployed. The Six Year Plan had been launched with a warning to the unions that wages would have to be blocked in favour of profits and investments. 'Our Six Year Plan,' the unions charged, 'cannot plan for imperialistic expatriates, for the Ministers, for the police and the army, for the parasitic elite, and leave out the major producers of the national wealth.' In the end, the government promised to reopen wage negotiations, and the strike was called off. But the workers went back to work without clear gains. The streets were emptied of the demonstrations and the picket lines, but not before Nigeria had been given a fleeting view of a force that asserted itself across regional, ethnic and party barriers. After the strike government and employers were quick to exploit differences between the various unions and union federations, lest this force seize the initiative again. The strike had been spectacular in the history of West African political activity; but its impact was short-lived, and the unions did not take long to lapse again into division and rivalry, while the political parties continued their scramble for vantage points in the system.

A final round remained to be played in the electoral struggle for power. To the West, in October 1965, came the election that ended all Nigerian elections. The Akintola government had used its years in office to destroy the apparatus of Action Group support, and build its own. Chiefs, officials in local government, contractors, business and professional men realized that their livelihoods lay with the patronage dispensed by the party in power; and the toppling of one spoils system had, of course, made room for newcomers. Yet the Action Group remained the party of majority support in the West. This was a time of falling cocoa prices and depressed conditions for farmers. Big men in the villages had crossed to the side of the NNDP, but small men were being squeezed. They pinned their hopes on the next round of elections. This would settle the issue between the parties once and for all. If Akintola's group had to submit to the popular vote, he would not for long remain in office. But elections in the West were marked by the use of blatant and unrestrained thuggery and ingenious trickery. Electoral officers were snatched away before opposition candidates could lodge

their nomination papers. Ballot boxes were stuffed with ballot forms that had been distributed to supporters days before the election. Ditches were dug round towns so that the supporters of opposition candidates could not approach the polling stations. In one constituency, an Action Group candidate won the seat; but as his supporters were celebrating victory, they heard a broadcast announcement in which the polling figures of the two candidates had been reversed. The Action Group won fifteen seats out of eighty-eight.

As the full impact of the election was felt, the region seemed to be holding its breath. The NNDP had been keeping an important decision in reverse until the election was over; now it could no longer be withheld. There was to be a substantial reduction in the price paid to cocoa farmers. This news on top of the election fraud pushed the countryside into open revolt. The farmers attacked the big men who had sided with the ruling clique of the NNDP, hounded them from the area, burned their crops, their property and their persons. ('Oba Roasted' said the newspaper headlines.) Telephone wires were disconnected, roads blockaded, taxis prohibited from plying the streets, markets and motorparks boycotted or shut down. One town after another in the West set up road-blocks, manned by Action Group or UPG A supporters, to prevent NNDP politicians from returning with force to intimidate communities that had shown opposition sympathies. The police and the army were brought in to put down the revolt. The security operation terrorized the peasantry to the point of gravely disrupting the harvest and the marketing system. As for government, it had virtually disintegrated. What had begun as political violence to defeat a rival party in elections had grown into a lawlessness uncontrolled and uncontainable.

Nowhere outside the West did the political crisis reach such a total breakdown of civil government; but throughout Nigeria there was a profound disgust with politicians and politics. In the towns, there was a groundswell of popular discontent. Labourer and young professional were equally disillusioned with independence. In six years, Nigeria's political class had staggered drunkenly through a series of crises, each more damaging than

The Failure of Politics

the last, using ballot box, parliamentary speech, bribery, nepotism and, where required, thuggery, in the struggle for power. In the beginning, they had been obsessed with constitutional form and legal nicety; then, when occasion demanded, they had scrapped them outright. Burdened with a constitutional form that was faulty and unworkable, the political class had strained it to snapping point. No amount of rearranging could restore the form, only a fundamental reappraisal of national needs, and a different generation of political leaders to try to meet them. But national needs were the last thing that the politicians considered. They built a mass following to win elections, then abandoned their electorates as they devoted themselves to their bank balances and their businesses. Corruption was not back-door and furtive, but flaunted. Big men, men of power, lived on an extravagant scale. For a while, their communities enjoyed the reflected glory and whatever amenities their big men secured for them. But six years of fiddling the coffers to subsidize big men and their parties for the contest of power had wasted the country's economic resources, and the general benefits were drying up even in the favoured areas.

At the bottom of the Nigerian political crisis was the quarrel over spoils. And this took place at two levels. The first was the rivalry of the regions, which competed against each other for a larger share of the federal revenue, and of the export trade; over the location of industries and the allocations of development capital. Federal politics had turned out to be the politics of Northern domination; Federal economics turned out to be the economics of Northern development. In the Six Year Development Plan, 'the bulk of Federal development spending is being concentrated in the North'.¹⁶ When it came to the proposed iron and steel industry for Nigeria, the whole project was held up because the North would not agree to site it in the East, the location recommended by a feasibility study. In the end, three plants were proposed; one for the North, another for the East, and a third one for the West. None has yet been built.

On the second level of the quarrel, there was competition – often called tribalism – for jobs, for promotion, for vice-chancellorships of universities and chairmanships of corporations.

In the beginning, the competition was fought out between Westerners (the Yoruba) and Easterners (mainly the Ibo) in the Southern labour market, professions and public service. Nigerianization and the departure of expatriate officials produced a great spate of openings, but also fierce squabbles.¹⁷ The years just before independence had been boom years; but when commodity prices, especially that of cocoa, began to fall on the world market, and foreign capital did not arrive in the quantities anticipated, the supply of jobs began to dry up, and the elites, the school-leavers, the unemployed and the newcomers to the towns fought desperately for what there was. By the early 1960s, urban unemployment in the South was almost 30 per cent; one in ten of the pupils who held a secondary-school certificate could not find work; and it was estimated that by 1968 there would be 1,000 unemployed university graduates in the area.¹⁸ Northerners, once insulated in their own system, began to assert their claims to the plums in Federal government and employment. Three streams of competitors – excluding minority groups, which were permitted no distinct identity – used their political and community leverage to promote their own interests.

A job affected more than the applicant and his immediate family. Each post, especially the higher ones, benefited a host of kinsmen, a local community, a region. A dispute over a university vice-chancellorship in Lagos, or Ibadan, became an inter-racial dispute. Politics were organized on a regional basis, and politics contrived economic opportunities. Even when the connexion was not so intimate, the habit of ganging-up by region became virtually endemic, except in small uninfluential pockets of the society. The politicians had produced no ideology of national unity which would interpret conflict in social or class terms; and the structure of Nigeria at independence filtered all contests into regional, and so inevitably, ethnic or communal, channels.

THE ARMY INFECTED

The regional cleavages and built-in discord of Nigeria's political system entered, not surprisingly, the army. There, as in *politics*, it was insisted that regional security and guarantees would

cement unity; there, as in politics, far from building a national force and national allegiance, regionalism created fierce strains and divisions. The army became the military counterpart of the contesting regional groups in the country's politics, and finally it went to war with itself.

When coups were breaking out all over Africa in the early 1960s, Nigerians complacently declared that it could never happen to them. There were, after all, the three regions, with three sets of political allegiances (not counting the small, later-established Mid-West). Within them, the army operated under a system of rotating commands and spells of duty, so that a brigade would serve in the West for three months, then be moved to the North, and so on. Nigeria was too big, its political allegiances too dispersed, its army command too diversified, its officer corps too carefully balanced, ever to make a military coup a possibility there.

Before independence, Nigeria's army was woefully inefficient. The relics of Britain's officer corps, transferred out of India but not yet ready for retirement, made up its expatriate command, including the non-commissioned officers. There were some African warrant officers. And the 'other ranks' were totally African. After the war, when the W A F F was broken into constituent national forces, there were slots for West African cadets at Sandhurst; but few were taken up, because the candidates found it so difficult to get past the scrutiny of the selection board. At independence, in October 1960, the Nigerian army consisted of five battalions and certain supporting units organized into two brigades; one at Kaduna, in the North, and one in the South, at Apapa. About one in seven of the officers was Nigerian; and the highest ranking Nigerian officers were three majors. It was planned to treble the number of officers by 1962; then all the subalterns would be Nigerian, together with 5 per cent of the captains and 20 per cent of the higher ranks.

Independence brought an accelerated demand for Africanization. And one month after independence came the decision to send a Nigerian contingent to the Congo, for which a Third Brigade was rapidly raised. 'For political reasons,' said a British army observer, 'of course they wanted it to be as black as

possible.' In the Federal Parliament there were pressures for speedier Africanization. 'Om army in the Congo is being looked after by an officer who is not Nigerian,' protested Mr C. O. D. Eneh.¹⁹ But the Minister of Defence, Alhaji Mohammed Ribadu, warned against Nigerianizing so fast as to produce another Mobutu! 'I appeal to both sides of the House,' said the minister, 'not to bring politics into the army. Because one has a brother in the army, he should not stand up and say "Nigerianize the armed forces".'

But politics had already been introduced into the army by the Federal government. One of its first acts – under British pressure – had been to introduce a quota system for the recruitment of officers and men, which was intended to reproduce in the army the dominance of the North in the political system. The Northern region was to have 50 per cent of army recruits, officers and men, with the Eastern and Western regions 25 per cent each. This principle of regional balance was also applied to the selection of candidates for training schemes abroad, as Nigeria added to the old connexion by establishing defence links with other parts of the Commonwealth, like Canada and India, as well as Ethiopia, the United States and Israel. Recruiting of ground troops was supposed to be based on provincial allocations, to prevent a particular region from being over-represented, or certain traditional areas of army enlistment from outweighing others. This was of particular Northern concern, since the Middle Belt was just such a traditional area, and the emirates of the far or 'true' North were not. In practice, however, army recruitment in far Northern centres like Sokoto, Katsina and Kano was virtually nil. The bulk of the riflemen in the army – some say as many as 75 per cent²⁰ – were Northerners, but mostly from the Middle Belt. There was also heavy enlistment among men from Bornu, and from Niger and Chad, who crossed the border into Nigeria so as to join the army. Some recruits from areas considered over-represented in the army took on Hausa names and gave their origins as some centre in the far North. Others bought themselves places. In certain places, it was said to cost £10, and later £20, to persuade the recruiting officer. In the Middle Belt the army had become a traditional

The Failure of Politics

avenue for employment, and even in many Southern towns there was strong competition to be enlisted: army pay was steady and three or four times the national average wage. The army did not publish regional statistics; but it was clear that the system of 'balanced' regional representation was not working in practice.*

If the ground troops were predominantly Middle-Belters, the officer corps was dominated by Southerners, especially Easterners. For until the operation of the quota system, officer corps selection had been by open competition, with entry by educational qualification. By the end of 1961, the great majority of tradesmen, technical and transport staff, signallers and clerks were Southerners. In the ranks of major and above, Southerners outnumbered Northerners by about five to one.²¹ Three-quarters of the officers were Easterners, the majority of them products of schools round Onitsha (during the 1950s, incidentally, there were more schools in this region than in the whole of the North).²² Easterners had taken advantage of the pre-independence British-initiated scheme to enlist university graduates for officer training, and about half the Sandhurst generation commissioned between 1954 and 1960 were Ibos from the East and the Mid-West.²³ The quota system was devised to speed the intake and training of Northerners; and with it went a concerted effort to promote Northerners more rapidly, especially into the middle-level officer group where Easterners were so dominant.

By 1965, when the army was totally Nigerianized, about half the officer corps was Ibo. In the highest levels of command, there was a careful sprinkling of regional representation: two of the five brigadiers came from the West, two from the East and one from the North. Among the battalion commanders, there were two Northerners, a Westerner, a Mid-Westerner, two Easterners (one of them Ojukwu) and a Rivers man, with the regions more or less equally represented in headquarter and special branch posts.²⁴ The quota system began to show results at the level of the junior officer ranks. Ibo officers still predom-

* In April 1963 a Senator asked the Minister of Defence how many men had been recruited into the army from each region since 1960. 'It will not be in the public interest to divulge this information,' was the Minister's reply.

inated in the middle ranks, especially at the level of major. But Northerners were being favoured for promotion and pushed upwards faster than their Southern counterparts. It was plain that redressing the balance through the quota system meant favouring the North. There were many Southern officers eligible for promotion; but they had to stand by and watch Northerners of shorter service and less experience being promoted over their heads instead.

Far from controlling regionalism, therefore, the quota system only inflamed it. Southerners were quick to notice that, like the weighting of the constitution, the army quota was calculated to guarantee the hegemony of the North. It was noted, too, that the Minister of Defence was invariably an influential NPC politician – first Ribadu, then Inuwa Wada; and that the military academy, the air force training school and the ordnance factory were all sited in the North. Surely, Southerners argued, the most equitable national system for the army, as in politics and the civil service, was not to weight the system in favour of any one region, but to pin access on the basis of merit. The quota system was, in fact, abusing the army for the purposes of Northern politics. To the middle-rankers in the officer corps, the political disabilities of the South and their own professional disabilities in the army converged only too glaringly.

Promotion blockages caused by the rapid Africanization of the army took on the same *political* and regional overtones. The rush to localize the army had meant rapid promotion for the senior command. The ranks below had to wait on the death or retirement of relatively young men. And the way that Northerners were being favoured for promotion looked like meaning that Southern middle officers would be largely passed over. This promotion jam after the rapid upgrading of the officer corps was, of course, not exclusive to Nigeria; it was experienced by every African army that Africanized with the onset of independence: but in the Nigerian army it was one more source of stress inside an officer corps already rumbling with regional discord.

There was also, of course, the usual tension in African armies between the different educational generations of officer. Irons and the most senior officers had risen steadily through the ranks.

The Failure of Politics

The younger officers had graduated from secondary schools at least, some from a university, and had then won their commissions against stern competition. They openly despised the inferior intellectual showing and narrow professionalism of their seniors. But more than the cleavages between men from different army backgrounds and generations, with a jealous eye fixed on the weighted system of officer-recruitment and promotion, it was the political crisis in the country that threw the army into politics.

Middle-ranking Southern officers identified with their equivalents in civilian life. They had been to school – a few of them, to university – with their equivalent age group in the civil service, the professions and politics. They associated the fixing of Northern control in the army with Northern dominance in politics; and the top brass in the army, who connived at this system, with the corruption and incompetence of the political class. When it came to filling the place of the British army head who withdrew in 1965, it was obvious to the whole country that each of the contestants – Brigadiers Maimalari, Ademulegun and Ironsi – had his backers among the political bosses. It did not endear Ironsi to the discontented young officers that the Federal premier, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, backed him, against even the opposition of the Sardauna, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Northern premier, who wanted Maimalari. After this, Ironsi was regarded as 'Balewa's boy'. Then, the corruption of politics began to infect the armed services. Three Nigerian naval officers embezzled nearly one-tenth of the 1964 navy vote.²⁵ There were leakages about the ingenious system of perks used by Minister of Defence Ribadu to ensure the loyalty of the army's top officers: he had been Minister of Lagos Affairs before he took on the Defence portfolio, and was admirably placed to influence the allocation of building sites in the capital. It was said of Brigadier Ademulegun, a Westerner in command in the North who had taken to polo with verve so as to hasten his acceptance in the region's social and political hierarchy: 'The Sardauna dashes him with ponies.'

By the constitutional crisis at the end of 1964, when Dr Azikiwe charged that the elections were not free or fair and found

himself in a showdown with NPC power, the army was politics-ridden and divided into pro-Balewa and pro-Azikiwe groups. At the height of the crisis, when the army had been paraded round Lagos in battle order, Dr Azikiwe²⁶ summoned the heads of the army, the navy and the police to State House, so as to assert his presidential control over the services. The legal advice obtained by the service chiefs contradicted this assertion. The UGPA feared that the NPC would remove Azikiwe, for someone who would obediently nominate Balewa as premier. It was at this point that a group of lieutenant-colonels in the army, with Ojukwu prominent among them, offered intervention by a section of the army on the president's side. The go-between was Azikiwe's eldest son, who was a close friend of Ojukwu and arranged a private meeting between the president and the officer in State House. Ojukwu urged Azikiwe to take seriously the rumours of his impending arrest and protective custody by the army. He advised him to assume emergency powers and form a provisional government. The army, Ojukwu assured the president, would not arrest him, and some of his officer colleagues would back a provisional government.

One version has it that the plan came to nothing because Azikiwe wanted to know its details before he gave the go-ahead, and the officers' attitude was, 'You leave that to us'.¹¹⁷ When Azikiwe disclosed the incident in 1966,²⁸ he maintained he had assured the young officers that he had no political ambitions, and had throughout his political life always advocated an orderly change of government. (He, had, however, taken the scheme for the assumption of emergency powers and the setting up of a provisional government to lawyers, six in all; they, of course, had advised that the Constitution gave the president no such powers.)

The incipient rebellion against the senior army command in 1964 evaporated with the crisis itself. One significant feature of the plot was that among the lieutenant-colonels whom Ojukwu approached to join him were Yakubu Gowon, a young Middle Belt officer, and David Ejoor, from the Mid-West. (Both rejected the scheme.) The officer coup was thus conceived as an intervention against NPC power and Northern dominance, in

which opposition elements from both North and South would join. The president was an Easterner, but that was incidental to his role as figure-head of the political opposition to the Northern ruling group. Significantly, too, planning was done at the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and initiative was preserved at that level. Two years later, when the 1966 coup took place, it was organized at the level of major, and no lieutenant-colonel was included in the inner group. There were, accordingly, strong cleavages inside the army between officer ranks, and a repeated tendency, when officers acted, for them to do so within their particular army 'generation'.* When they did act, however, it was not for reasons, primarily, of intra-army conflict, but in response to political challenges outside into which, they felt, the army was being drawn.

Nine months after the country-wide constitutional crisis, the Western region began to erupt. The 4th Battalion, stationed in the West for the better part of nine years before being transferred to the North in 1966, was used, inevitably, as an extension of the Akintola administration. Many young officers resented this use of the army. The battalion commander, Colonel Largema, was publicly exposed for giving 'secret' military support to the NNDP.²⁹ A soldier was court-martialled, and in the course of his trial he announced that he had listed his commander's acts of partiality: these included harbouring Akintola in his official

*A. R. Luckham, *The Nigerian Army* (paper presented to a post-graduate seminar of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London 1968), commenting on the phenomenon of the January coup being led by majors, the July one by lieutenants, and the fact that a group of lieutenant-colonels had contemplated intervening in the crisis over the Federal elections of 1964, says: "This reflects a well-developed tendency in the Nigerian army for interaction and friendship to cluster within groups of military peers, a tendency which is represented in its strongest form by the solidarity that develops between "course mates", those who have been through the Nigerian Military Training College and Sandhurst, Mons or other cadet training schools together. . . . Yet although peer groups provided a pattern or frame for cleavage . . . conflicts in the army drew their dynamic from elsewhere and created new conflict groups that transcended the lines between the ranks. The Majors of January did have their grievances against their seniors, but these were definitely secondary to their main political objectives; and it was the strategy of the coup more than feelings of direct antagonism which dictated the murder of the army's senior officers"

quarters; bringing politicians into the army barracks to sign for the issue of self-loading rifles, and inviting them to practise firing at the forty-five yards range. Colonel Largema, he claimed, had personally supervised Chief Akintola's target practice. In the week after the fraudulent election, army units and armoured cars were widely deployed in the region. But the presence of the soldiers- many of them UPGA supporters- only added to the tension. Eventually, at the insistence of the general officer commanding, Major-General Ironsi, the troops were withdrawn from the West, and mobile police from the North were brought in to replace them.³⁰

After three months of unrelenting violence, the NNNDP found itself driven out of almost all areas in the region except Oyo in the North. Its administration was collapsing and being ousted by local improvisations in the Action Group strongholds. NNNDP 'refugees' had crowded into Ibadan, the capital, which was close to open warfare. Akintola himself was reported to be moving through the city in an ambulance for safety, and to be ordering a total blackout of the city's street lights when he was travelling from one point to another. An £8,000 bullet-proof car was on order from Germany, the first such to be imported into Nigeria.³¹ Yet when the Federal government was pressed to deal with the emergency in the West, the Federal premier and the premier of the North echoed one another in declaring that there was a legally established authority in the West, and 'no reports of any breakdown of law and order'.³² The Western House of Assembly opened with armed soldiers and police standing shoulder to shoulder round the House and inside the Chamber.

Early in 1966, the Northern premier and Chief Akintola met at Kaduna. It was the week that the Commonwealth prime ministers assembled in Lagos for one of their sporadic conferences. Security arrangements were tightened along the ten-mile route from Ikeja airport to Lagos, where cars were being burnt and thugs were active in broad daylight. Balewa, said his critics, was debating whether violence should be used against a white minority regime in Rhodesia, while turning his face from the violence in his own country. By now there was a widespread

belief in the South that, with the failure of police and spasmodic army operations to stamp out opposition, the army was to be thrown into the West for drastic action to prop up the Akintola regime. The operation, it was said, was timed for 17 January. Legislation for preventive detention was to be placed before the Federal Parliament the day after the army moved in. A list of Action Group activists for liquidation or detention was said to include a judge, renowned for the fearlessness of his decisions in cases against Akintola supporters, and leading Action Group intellectuals. The rumours were becoming too persistent to ignore. There were also suspicious moves afoot to change the army and police command. It was suggested to General Ironsi (without success) that he take his accumulated leave at this time. Changes in the police command resulted in a Northerner, Alhaji Kam Salem, stepping up to become acting head in the place of two Eastern officers senior to him.³³

To UPGA politicians, the operation began to sound more ominous than just a move to crush resistance in the West. There were suggestions of a simultaneous declaration of emergency in more than one area. Powerful Northern voices interpreted the violence in the West as instigated by the Eastern regions.³⁴ There was the curious case of Isaac Bora and the Niger Delta Congress, which claimed to speak for the minority Rivers people in the Eastern region. It was alleged that the NPC was encouraging Bora, an undergraduate of Nsukka University, to start an insurrection in the Niger Delta, so as to provide a pretext for moving Northern soldiers into Eastern Nigeria.* This was how the Action Group had been toppled in the West: why not the same fate for the NCNC in the East, since it had gone into opposition?³⁵

In some circles in the capital, the rumour was current that the plans for declaring an emergency in the East had gone so far that there was already rivalry for the job of administrator.

* Bora was brought to trial in 1966 and condemned to death for his part in stoking rebellion and setting up a 'new' government. He was condemned to death, but released by the Gowon government, and given a commission in the Nigerian army (*West Africa*, 14 October 1967, p. 1331; *Daily Times*, April 1966).

But even if political gossip was improving on schemes actually laid, it was apparent that the Sardauna and Akintola were planning a final assault to entrench the NNDDP in the West. It was after the meeting of these two politicians in Kaduna on 14 January, and in the conviction that the army was about to be used for the repression of the West, that the young majors jerked into action.

Ghana: Heirs jump the Queue

I believe it is u-ue of any country to say that the soldier is a much better proposition to deal with than, for example, the politician, whatever the colour of his skin.

General H. T. Alexander, *African Tightrope*

For many years in Ghana, the Colonial Office had been juggling a power balance of the traditional chiefs-cum-administrators with the propertied middle class and Western-trained intellectuals in the United Gold Coast Convention. But in the social and economic upheavals of the post-war years, new aspirants jumped the queue to usurp the position that the older elite regarded as their own. During the war, the West African territories had been closely tied to the Allied economies; Ghana, perhaps, most of all. Then, after the war, there was a steep decline in terms of trade; import prices soared because of shortages; and there was mass discontent, linking towns and villages, over rising costs of living. The towns of West Africa were flooded with work-seekers and members of a fast-growing urban petty-bourgeoisie. The UGCC leadership had been essentially an African business lobby, seeking to capture the trade of European merchant-importers and the Lebanese trading community. In 1949 Kwame Nkrumah, having returned from abroad to become the Convention's secretary, led a militant breakaway from the UGCC, which became the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP).¹ It attracted in opposition to the worthy

of the professions and academics in the U G C C, elementary school-leavers, teachers, clerks, messengers in government and commercial offices, petty traders, artisans and transport workers, small-scale contractors and small businessmen, urban wage-earners and ex-servicemen. The CPP's organizational base was provided by the network of youth, workers' and farmers' associations set up, or linked together, by Nkrumah when he had been U G C C secretary.

Discrete elitist representations gave way to processions by ex-servicemen, strikes and other militant activity. The year 1950 saw the launching of the first 'positive action', the Gandhian-type tactic devised by Nkrumah. Once launched, these positive action campaigns were brief and poorly sustained; but they took Nkrumah and other party leaders to jail and to political prominence. The CPP became Africa's leading mass party. In municipal elections held in Accra, the capital, a few months after the first 'positive action' initiative, the CPP won every seat; and it emerged triumphant in the first general election of 1951. The governor and the Colonial Office had to recognize that the party was the most representative and influential political force in the country. Less than two years after its formation, Nkrumah was Leader of Government Business in Ghana. For the next six years, from self-government to independence, the CPP was a partner in government with the colonial power.

It was during this period, a critic has written,² that the character and orientation of the CPP, as the movement of a petty bourgeoisie seeking to entrench itself, were indelibly fixed, notwithstanding Nkrumah's later efforts to change both party and policy. The initial post-election period was one of tactical action to mark the transition to full independence. The CPP would work through colonial government to liberate Ghana from colonial rule. The party had, at one and the same time, not to forfeit electoral support and yet give colonial officials evidence of its moderation and responsibility in government.

Above all, this was the period when CPP economic policy served to keep colonial economic interests intact. For the first ten years of CPP government, the party made no structural

changes of any kind to the economy. A symbiotic relationship between Britain and Ghana in the marketing of cocoa, Ghana's chief export, preserved old colonial ties and, at the same time, helped the CPP cement itself in power. Two young analysts have shown³ how, at this time, it was the funds of Ghana's Cocoa Marketing Board, and those of other African colonies with similar produce-marketing machinery, which primed the pump of Britain's post-war economic recovery. Ghana supplied Britain with more capital than any colony except Malaya. The Board was the country's sole buyer, grader, seller and exporter of cocoa; and a reserve fund was built up by setting the price paid to domestic growers at a lower level than that prevailing in the world market. A large part of the country's economic surplus was thus accumulated by one body, and in London. By the end of 1955, Ghana's overseas reserves stood at £208 million. These blocked sterling balances were invested in long-term British government securities: the colonies were lending money to the colonial power. The practice was indispensable to Britain's economic interests. It was also invaluable to the CPP, which used it to undermine political and economic opposition among the developing or aspirant bourgeoisie of rich cocoa farmers and merchants, and to promote support through the dispensation of benefits and patronage. In 1952, the CPP founded the Cocoa Purchasing Company (as a subsidiary of the Cocoa Marketing Board), to become Ghana's largest cocoa-broker. The vigorous growth of a Ghanaian bourgeoisie had been stunted by the monopoly of the UAC and other foreign firms, which dominated the import-export trade, and controlled prices, import licences and wholesale credit. The effect of the CPP's cocoa policy was to undermine this class further still, for government went into direct competition with local cocoa-brokers. Determined to prevent the growth of a Ghanaian capitalist class, Nkrumah deliberately brought under attack not only the policies of the embryonic Ghanaian bourgeoisie but also their economic foundation. And into the vacuum caused by the absence of a matured bourgeoisie and entrenched political class, stepped the CPP, the party of the petty bourgeoisie. The Cocoa Purchasing Company provided the party with large supplies of credit, and

The Failure of Politics

business openings with which to consolidate its own support. Big farmers and chiefs in the rural economy were by-passed or assailed; in their place the CPP assisted poorer farmers, especially those who joined the CPP-sponsored United Ghana Farmers' Cooperative Council. Party leaders, parliamentarians and party supporters acquired contracts, commissions, loans and licences. CPP rank-and-filers were favoured for jobs. Funds made available for welfare projects consolidated community support. In the hands of the CPP, political authority was translated into control of state resources, which in turn dispensed party patronage as elsewhere in West Africa by a not dissimilar process.

The CPP's cocoa policy consolidated its echelons of support; but the cocoa farmers with whom it had entered into business competition, the businessmen worried by the threat of state buying in timber as well as cocoa, the chiefs, and their allies within the established middle class and professions, were being fast antagonized, not least by the pegging of the cocoa price well below the world price. Antagonized, too, were certain elements inside the CPP. Some defectors joined the opposition, especially in Ashanti country; but in time it was the opposition within the party itself that was to prove more destructive than the opposition outside.

Outside opposition mustered in the National Liberation Movement, which was a party based on the Ashanti rulers and land-owners, cocoa farmers and traders – both the traditional leadership and embryonic bourgeoisie in the richest part of the country – and which was reinforced by regional interest groups like the Northern Peoples' Party and the Togoland Congress, among others. The strategy of this old-style alliance was to delay the granting of independence, and to demand a federal constitution from which regions would have the right to secede. Hedging its bets for the last time, the Colonial Office insisted on a fresh round of elections in 1956 – though there had been elections only two years earlier, in 1954 – and the attainment by the winning party of 'a substantial majority'; how substantial was never defined. The Colonial Office, influenced by the NLM leader Dr Busia, and by commercial interest in London which consistently overstated the strength of the Ghanaian opposition

to the CPP,⁴ was at cross-purposes with its governor-on-the-spot in Ghana, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, who anticipated that the CPP would sweep the polls and calculated his strategy for the transfer of power accordingly. ⁵ In the elections, the opposition won most of the seats in Ashanti and the North; but, overall, the CPP emerged with a handsome majority. (It was, however, an abysmally low poll; in fact, only one in six Ghanaians eligible to vote actually supported the CPP, on the very eve of independence.⁶ This low level of popular mobilization was to dog the CPP in this and subsequent elections.)

By 1957 the National Liberation Movement and other opposition groupings had consolidated in the United Party; for government had passed a law requiring that all political parties should be nation-wide, with membership open to all, irrespective of tribe or region. Now firmly in the saddle, with independence at last, the CPP proceeded to concentrate power at the centre and to weaken the potential opposition of the regions. The regional assemblies, protected by the independence constitution, were curbed, and then abolished; the powers of the chiefs were circumscribed; and entrenched provisions on the judiciary and the civil service were revoked. Opposition immediately after independence had been open and expressed, and on occasion even spectacular, as with the troubles in Trans-Volta Togoland, and in Accra itself where the urban unemployed and the Ga petty-bourgeoisie demonstrated against the CPP government. The CPP began to stamp out resistance with the apparatus of the state. The Preventive Detention Law was passed in 1958; and strikes were made illegal at about the same time. The assets of pro-opposition state and local councils were confiscated; and opposition MPs themselves were arrested.

Ghana's experiment in socialism failed, it has been argued,⁷ because the attempt to break with Ghana's colonial past was not made soon enough, and because, when it was made, it was not complete. There were two distinct periods in Ghana under Nkrumah and the CPP. The first was the pro-Western period from 1957 to 1961. During this Ghana operated as a neo-colony within the British sphere of interest. It looked to the British

pound as its anchor of safety. It kept its external reserves in London instead of in Accra, and allowed the British banks systematically to deflate the economy. Cocoa dominated (from 1950 to 1962, it accounted for from 50 to 75 per cent of total exports). In 1958 manufacturing contributed only 1.8 per cent of the gross domestic product.⁸ The export-import enclave linked to the foreign overseas market was monopolized by foreign firms, and a major proportion of the country's surplus flowed out of the country.

Development strategy was orthodox and passive, with a total dependence on foreign capital for any projected industrialization. This policy, guided by W. A. Lewis, the eminent West Indian and later Princeton economist, was seen by the early 1960s to have failed. Ghana experienced a rapid deterioration in its balance of payments, lost huge amounts of its external reserves and failed to attract anywhere near the amount of foreign capital on which it had counted for industrial development. From 1957 to 1961, indeed, there was a net *outflow* of private capital. And by 1961, Ghana's balance of payments deficit was £53 million, or 12 per cent of the national product.⁹ It was, in fact, a conventional development plan inspired by orthodox economists in the pro-Western period, and not primarily the extravagance of the regime in its flirtation with 'socialist' planning, which depleted Ghana's foreign reserves between 1957 and 1961. A second development plan introduced in 1959 was informed by the same strategy of reliance on foreign capital, and of government activity in a welfare state direction only.

In 1961 this plan was abandoned. In its place came the Seven Year Plan for Work and Happiness. Ghana was to attain self-sustaining industrial growth by 1967, it was proclaimed, and the state was to play the major role in economic development. The Plan would try for the first time to alter Ghana's rigid export orientation and, in an internal economic breakthrough, to exploit some of the surpluses previously leaked overseas. Ghana, Nkrumah decided, was to be a socialist state.¹⁰

Five years later, the Seven Year Plan was floundering and Ghana was eye-deep in debt, with a balance of payments crisis that bonded her to external – mostly Western – creditors. A

cabal of army officers and policemen was able to use the falling growth rate of the economy, among other things, to justify its armed seizure of power.

Yet Ghana had made attempts, however limited and ill-conceived, to chart a development course towards industrialization. There had been an unprecedented growth in the necessary infrastructure: the deep-water harbour at Tema; the improved railways; the new roads built and maintained; the Volta dam project, which generated a vast increase of electricity, even if it did not meet the other demands of the Seven Year Plan; and the moves to establish a national shipping line and airways. There had been what were, for Africa, unprecedented programmes of constructive social welfare, *with* the spread of benefits not to a closed elite circle, but beyond, to the village. Great strides had been made towards free and compulsory primary and secondary education; new universities had been built, and university education made free; a beginning had been made in the establishment of a free health service, and the first steps taken towards a social insurance scheme, including unemployment benefits and pensions. But the debts *were* rocketing; and, in its crucial purposes, the Seven Year Plan *was* failing.

In the decade between 1955 and 1965, the gross domestic product doubled; but the import-export sector continued to dominate, and cocoa and cocoa products still accounted for 66 per cent of all exports, with very little processing done inside Ghana itself. The Plan was to balance the economy between agriculture and industry to support secondary industry on the products of agriculture; and to provide, meanwhile, sufficient cheap food for the people. But foodstuff production was almost stagnant; the price of locally grown food rose between 1963 and 1964 by as much as 400 per cent in some regions (the national rise was 36 per cent), and the state farming ventures were disappointing if not outright failures, having produced food in quantities which did not justify anything like their capital and current investment. Manufacturing remained a tiny share of the gross national product: it was 3.8 per cent in 1962, and 4.4 per cent in both 1963 and 1964. There had been heavy government outlay on consumer and capital goods factories, but

The Failure of Politics

industrialization had been spasmodic and ill-planned, and had relied heavily on short-term financing by suppliers' credits.* Ironically, as has been shown,¹² foreign investment was plainly unimpressive during the period of *laissezfaire* and state inactivity in industrialization; while, during the period of 'socialist' experiment after 1961, foreign capital poured in, relatively speaking. By 1964 Ghana had received £68 million-worth of medium- and short-term credits.¹³ But of this amount, £157 million consisted of suppliers' credits, with the bulk of repayments concentrated within four to six years.¹⁴ Ghana's economy was fast drowning in cumulative debt; and as early as 1964, the mounting repayment commitments were beginning to disrupt the economy.

Nkrumah, up to the fall of his government and even after, refused to recognize the nature or the magnitude of the crisis in Ghana's economy. ('Of course the Ghanaian economy was not without its problems, but is this not true of all national economies, and particularly of those of developing countries in the context of the growing gap between rich and poor nations? Our imperialist critics would be better employed examining the economic situation in their own countries, many of which are in grave financial difficulties.')

It has been suggested¹⁶ that the Nkrumah government in its last years began to lose control, and even knowledge, of Ghana's external debt.

Certainly, the government's financial system was in a state of virtual collapse, a critic¹⁷ deduced from the auditor-general's

*'The system of suppliers' credits is one in which individual foreign firms undertake to complete a "development" project under an agreement guaranteed by the firm's government. The firm then advances the credit for the cost of the project to the African government, generally at terms above the prevailing rates, with the principal to be paid in four to six years. The debt is in turn guaranteed by the African government. Consequently one of the main points about these foreign "investors" is that they do not invest. They neither risk any of their own money nor wait for the project to pay before they take their profit.' (*West Africa*, 26 March 1966, p. 341.) Furthermore, as the bulk of these debts were contracted in foreign exchange, repayment worsened Ghana's balance of payments position, at a time when no additional foreign exchange was forthcoming from other sectors of the economy.

annual report of government accounts in the last year of the Nkrumah regime. Complete records of several contracts and suppliers' credit agreements did not exist in the government's official files. Estimates of expenditure in the final accounts were found not to include credit committed and utilized by the government, with the result that Ministry of Finance control became a game of blind man's buff. And apart from major breakdowns in the country's system of financial regulation there were scores of minor irregularities, some due to corruption, but many to

the disturbing gap between the increasing complexity of government operations and the fall in standards of integrity and in the level of technical competence... A substantial portion of the taxpayers' money sustains little more than the unmistakable incompetence of some civil servants.

At the beginning of 1964, Finance Minister Kwesi Amoako-Atta laid a twenty-six page memorandum before the Cabinet, in an attempt to draw attention to Ghana's precarious financial position. But the memorandum received short shrift from Nkrumah, who was notoriously impatient with unfavourable reports. Two days before the 1966 coup d'etat, the Budget speech acknowledged certain economic difficulties; but it attributed them, in the main, to the catastrophic drop in the price of cocoa. The CPP had, indeed, come to power in the post-war period of soaring cocoa prices, and had built its regime, as it had drawn its development plans, on the politics of cocoa prosperity. In 1954, the price had been £350 a ton. The Seven Year Plan had been drafted on the basis of an average £r80 a ton, and on the assumption that increased output would ensure an average annual foreign currency income of £86 million. (The cocoa monopolies had, in the post-war years, urged Ghana and other West African countries to increase output, and had pledged that a fair and stable price, of at least £200—so a ton, would be forthcoming.) By the 1960s, however, the cocoa boom was over; and by August 1965 cocoa was selling for as little as £go a ton. Ghana's cocoa production had doubled, but its export earnings had fallen to below pre-1957 levels. As foreign exchange problems worsened, the government's first recourse

The Failure of Politics

had been to employ the reserves; then, to depend on supplier credits. If the world cocoa price had not crashed, Ghana's economic crisis would undoubtedly have been cushioned, at least for a time. But the economic crisis was not encompassed by the cocoa price.

Ghana under the Seven Year Plan achieved an impressive state-enforced rate of capital accumulation; the envy, indeed, of many a development planner. The trouble was that the mobilization of capital was nowhere matched by any similar mobilization of human resources, in political, administrative and technical commitment or even enthusiasm for Ghana's economic goals. The paradox was, an economist has suggested,^{1,8}

that in the period when the rate of investment was being increased, the rate of growth of the economy as a whole was slowing down. In other words, while additions to the stock of capital were growing, the average output obtained from a unit of capital was declining.

Chaotic administration of import controls was one of the reasons; poor planning, another. 'The unthinking proliferation of hastily conceived state enterprises used up large amounts of foreign currency, but resulted in absurdly poor levels of economic performance. In 1963-4, for instance, the output of State enterprises was just over a quarter of the amount they were intended to produce.' Above all, the Seven Year Plan had become entirely dependent for its success on 'an inflow of foreign capital on a scale completely without precedence in the recent history of the country'.

This was puzzling in view of Nkrumah's consistent denunciation of the diabolical role played by foreign capital. Foreign investors, the Seven Year Plan had laid down, were to be welcomed in a spirit of partnership, for they would help Ghana in developing its full industrial potential. There was to be no partnership between local and foreign private capital, however, for this would encourage the growth of a Ghanaian capitalist class; it was to be a partnership between foreign investors and the Ghana state. Nkrumah remained confident that foreign capital could be attracted and yet regulated in its operation. The Volta River project was one of those partnership projects;

but the Ghana state proved a very junior and subservient partner indeed. At the opening of the Volta project, Nkrumah talked of a 'dual mandate'¹⁹ on the part of a power like the United States to increase its own prosperity and at the same time to assist in the prosperity of developing countries.* The Volta project did not, in practice, do both. Nkrumah and Ghana staked heavily on the hydro-electric dam and the aluminium industry at a period of rising aluminium prices. But by the time that the United States firm of Kaiser had amended the project as originally conceived, it was at sharp variance with the purposes of the Seven Year Plan.²⁰ Nkrumah's theory in welcoming foreign capital was that the state sector of the economy would be dominant. But the CPP lacked the popular political base, and the state economic control, to secure this primacy. The notions that foreign private capital would let itself be used to lay a foundation for socialism and that a state dependent on financing by private capital could retain the initiative, proved equally deceptive. Nkrumah wanted Ghana to contract out of the capitalist world, and yet hoped to develop his country's economy

*On 27 April 1964, before the Committee on Appropriations of the U.S. House of Representatives, William Kling, economic adviser of the Department of State's Bureau of African Affairs, and Otto E. Passman, Democratic Congressman from Louisiana who was chairman of the subcommittee on foreign appropriations, discussed the Volta River project:

KLING: 'Of course, Mr Chairman, I think in approaching this situation we have to realize that we have made a very substantial investment in Ghana so far. I think the consensus of the American businessmen that I have visited when I was in Ghana was that the Volta River Project was a force for good in the country.'

'I think we do have an interest in having the Volta Dam in Ghana. I do think we do have an interest in trying to preserve the very valuable resources of Africa for the free world. Africa does have a considerable amount of bauxite, electric power.'

PASSMAN: 'Do they also have a demand for aluminum?'

KLING: 'We have the demand for aluminum.'

PASSMAN: 'Do the African countries have a need for aluminum?'

KLING: 'They consume very little aluminum.'

PASSMAN: 'Do they have a need for aluminum?'

KUNG: 'Yes, a potentill need, but I agree there is an element of risk involved here. We certainly considered this very carefully, and it gives us sleepless nights, too.'

PASSMAN: (*Discussion off the record*)

with its aid. Far from laying a basis for full independence, let alone socialism, what was really happening in Ghana, it has been suggested, was 'a re-negotiation of terms with foreign capital (with accompanying re-distribution of surplus).'²¹

In the last two years of the CPP regime, while there was little searching scrutiny, there were some sidelong glances at policy. Agriculture was not developing, and there was a marked decline in the production of major export crops like coffee and timber, and even, in 1966, of cocoa. While the public sector accounted for some 38 per cent of all wage employment, this was largely unproductive. Inflation was rampant, with a flow of wages out of all proportion to production and thus a critical shortage of goods. During 1965 the Cabinet tried to tackle the problem of foreign exchange, and appealed for help to the International Monetary Fund. The IMF, however, made assistance conditional on a reshaping of Ghana's development goals and means. Ghana rejected all the IMF conditions but one: that the price paid to cocoa producers should be cut so as to bring it into line with world prices. (This price cut was announced two days before the coup d'etat that toppled the government.) There was another way out. This was to lessen dependence on the West by strengthening already growing economic links with the socialist states. Trade was being stepped up with such countries, and more and more development projects were handled by Soviet, Chinese and East German experts and technicians. Towards the end of 1965, a crucial mission, led by Finance Minister Amoako-Atta, set off for the socialist states, to negotiate the expansion of cocoa exports there. On its return it reported that it had secured guaranteed prices for a fixed quantity of cocoa in the remaining years of the Plan period. Part of the payment was to be made in sterling. If the deal went through, it would go a considerable way towards solving the foreign exchange crisis. The precise guaranteed price for cocoa was still being negotiated when the army and police coup struck at the government. There was no time to test whether the Soviet Union would have done for Ghana's cocoa what she was doing for Cuba's sugar exports. There had, however, been time enough for the significance of this swing in direction to be

measured by the opposition, both outside and within the CPP, as well as by Ghana's traditional trading partners.

THE STATE OF THE PARTY

When Finance Minister Amoaka-Atta set out on his mission, the then Minister of Trade, Kwesi Armah, was due to go with him; he opted out of the assignment because its ends were inimical to his own. Some in the CPP were committed to Ghana's declared goals, but they were greatly outnumbered by those who were not.

There were two essential political conditions for the success of Ghana's Second Revolution, it has been suggested.¹¹

First, the political structures had to be fully democratised so as to draw the mass of the people into the reconstruction of the economy and the state. Secondly, as a precondition of the first, the CPP ... had to be turned into an instrument for socialist transformation; in fact it turned out to be the major obstacle in the way of that transformation.

The CPP had been organized essentially as a vote-gathering machine, and it never really changed. It had no body of cadres at the grass roots to stimulate popular support; instead the state, and with it the party, used patronage and coercion. Above all, the party had no grasp of the problems involved in constructing a socialist economy.

Castro said, and Nkrumah echoed ruefully after his own fall, that socialism cannot be built without socialists. After 1961, Nkrumah's political commitment – though not necessarily his theoretical grasp – changed radically; the CPP's could not. It had never been an ideologically cohesive party, let alone one committed to socialism, even within its leadership. It was, from its formation, an omnibus party. It combined elements of the old Gold Coast intelligentsia, who left the UGCC when Nkrumah offered the prospect of power, with trading interests, mostly small contractors and the market mammals, middle and small farmers, all of whom had a basically free enterprise outlook; with the petty bourgeoisie of the towns and larger villages, clerks, secondary and primary school-leavers; with urban wage workers, and the unemployed. Many of Nkrumah's closest

lieutenants did not share his view of the need for Ghana's Second Revolution, from political to economic independence. They had been the life and soul of the 'positive action' campaigns; but once the CPP was in power, they had reached journey's end. They calculated on settling in office to enjoy the spoils. It was not always a matter of ideology. Ideology and ideologists were thin on the ground in the CPP. Views of socialism ranged from Krobo Edusei's description (no doubt influenced by his wife's gold bed and other finery): 'Socialism doesn't mean that if you've made a lot of money, you can't keep it',²³ to the finer definitions by a minute group of Marxists that was divided against itself in doctrinal polemic. The real differences within the CPP, certainly in the early days of power, were manifestations of the tug-of-war between different groups for authority and advantage. Intrigue and manipulation asserted personal, family, business, clan, community or other vested interests. The CPP became an unmanageable lobby of different pressure groups, with the tussles for power carried on at the university, in the press, in Parliament and in government ministries, as well as in the party itself.

Early-comers, the old-guard politicians, men such as Krobo Edusei, Kojo Botsio and Gbedemah, all Nkrumah's colleagues of the 'positive action' days, had built popular support in their constituencies and had their fortress in Parliament. Then there were those who entrenched themselves in bureaucratic office when the CPP began to run the Ghanaian state, with their armaments in the press. During 1961 Parliament and the press joined issue, as a spirited round in the battle for ascendancy was fought out.²⁴ In April of that year Nkrumah's dawn broadcast warned against the high living of MPs and ministers. A national call went out for an end to corruption and self-seeking. (In the event, manipulation only became more subterranean, and the proclamations of the party more glaringly incompatible with the deeds of its big men.) The dawn broadcast was the signal for an attack on the old political guard. The purpose was to undermine it, but not to annihilate it altogether, for Nkrumah doubted whether he could survive the backlash of its supporting factions. The old guard lost ground temporarily, but by the

following year it had recaptured the initiative. For meanwhile there occurred, in August 1962, the attempt on Nkrumah's life at Kulungugu. Several within the newer ranks of leadership, among the party managers and controllers – men like Tawia Adamafio, the former CPP secretary-general – were arrested for suspected involvement in the plot, tried for treason and thus removed from their positions of power. After Kulungugu, many of the old political guard were restored to office. They had lost the battle in 1961, but won the war in 1962. They had little power, but this was sufficient for their needs, especially as the new economic administration, devised in order to push the country towards socialism, and abounding in state corporations and controls, was prolific in opportunities for commissions and grants.²⁵

Over the years, the struggles between the CPP's parliamentary and bureaucratic elites were inconclusive. But their effect on the CPP was to render it totally ineffective except as a battleground between the factions. Politics in Ghana became the harangues of Nkrumah and the factional disputes. The factions themselves were never really reconciled. Their differences were never openly, let alone exhaustively, debated. Once the single party system removed the need for elections, the CPP, essentially a vote-gathering machine, rusted. There was no forum for thrashing out policy, and no instrument for popularly promoting such policy as there was.

Nkrumah himself, whether out of sentiment for his old colleagues or in fear of isolating himself from them, or both, avoided confrontations like the plague. They were not his style of work. Now and then, in the later years of his government, he confessed to intimates that he discounted the old CPP political generation for Ghana's Second Revolution. But he could not, and did not wish to dispense with it, and he calculated instead on neutralizing it. He became a past-master at balancing opposites to try to cancel conflict. He played off one faction against another, one veteran political operator against another – even combining within a single delegation or work party quite irreconcilable opposites – till the futility of it was apparent to almost everyone but himself.

Careful, thus, not to force a break with either the old-guard politicians, or with the younger but equally acquisitive bureaucrats in power, Nkrumah calculated during the later instalment of CPP government on developing new bases of support among still younger, ideologically trained cadres. These would be committed to socialism, and exercised in the skills of planting and watering the grass roots. The Winneba Ideological Institute (staffed in the main by expatriate teachers who were well versed in the European classics but had a very superficial knowledge of Ghanaian society) was to be the forcing house of the new political generation. And soon it was supplying candidates for office in party and ministries. Many of these had distinct theoretical commitments, if little practical experience, as a result of the Winneba courses; but their entry, far from immediately strengthening Nkrumah's radical arm, alerted the conservative old guard to counter-attack with accusations of plotting and subversion against the Nkrumah regime by the new men.

By 1965 the CPP was in an unmistakably run-down state. Nkrumah, receptive to highly coloured accounts, substituted security reports for contact with his people, party and country. The old guard close round him made sure that only they had his ear. Back-bench and party branch officials had no access to the president; and if they could not reach the president, they reached nowhere at all in the power structure. The party's national executive had long lapsed into oblivion. A crisis was created by a demand from some of the new men that the membership of the party's central controlling committee be announced. Manipulation of the factions was no longer enough. An attempt was made to revive the party, at least the national executive, which was enlarged to 240 members, including local party officials (as long as they were not MPs), and officials of the trade unions, the farmers' cooperative councils, the young pioneers and the workers' brigade. The machinery was being overhauled at last. But by then, it was already late in the day. (The first meeting of the new national executive took place on 18 December 1965.)

It was one thing to train new activists in the theory and strategy of socialism. It was quite another to produce cadres who

were not only adepts at talking ideology, but also in positions of mass leadership. For instance, a year after the programme for socialism was adopted, the CPP's trade-union support, which had played a leading role in the early CPP campaigns, was broken, with the smashing by government of the 1961 strike among railway workers at Sekondi and Takoradi. The strike had been sparked by the compulsory deduction of workers' savings from pay packets. (Independence had brought a temporary increase in real wages, but within a few years these had fallen heavily.) The strike gave Nkrumah the pretext for dismissing some of the old-guard politicians, like Gbedemah, but it also alienated permanently the trade-union support of the CPP. The strike was denounced by both CPP and TUC as counter-revolutionary; the workers were expected to subordinate their needs to those of the national economic plan. The unions lost their independence and were integrated into the state apparatus.

This had become inevitable. In 1960 Ghana got a new constitution; two years later, the CPP got a new programme for Work and Happiness, and a new structure to fit it for its role in the Second Revolution. The new constitution gave Ghana a highly centralized state. In the CPP there was an elaborate arrangement of bureaux and departments to tone up party organization and discipline. And Nkrumah himself exercised personal power wherever he thought it unsafe in the hands of associates. Under the pretext of mobilizing CPP supporting bodies, like the unions, the farmers' cooperatives, the youth and the women, these were assimilated into the CPP. Nkrumah thought that he was creating a new instrument for the country's changed needs. The result was not to galvanize popular initiative, but to stifle it. The trade unions came to be supervised by the Ministry of Labour, for the TUC was not much more than one of its sub-departments. The pioneer movement was run by the Ministry of Education. The farmers' organizations were controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. The mass movements no longer had any independent existence, but were absorbed by the party, which in turn blurred with the administration. Nkrumah, as secretary-general of the CP P, had power to appoint not only the members of the central committee, but the district

The Failure of Politics

commissioners, the pivot of local government. In time the party's committees no longer even met, and policy-making and discussion came to a dead stop. The Preventive Detention Act, first used to stifle the opposition when this had turned to violent resistance, was now used to silence rival factions in the party and government hierarchy.

Nkrumah paid lip-service to the need to re-tool the CPP for its new tasks of economic development. In reality, however, the CPP was left much as it was and simply by-passed more and more for the machinery and methods of the state administration. The party bureaucracy never really took root.²⁶ From the outset it was little more than Nkrumah's personal court. In the absence of open discussion and activity, there was soon little to unite the different factions of the party but allegiance to Nkrumah. The mystique of the leader, the regime, the party and the programme was not ideological, but a substitute for ideology. If all were united in their adulation of Nkrumah and took good care that this was constantly demonstrated, intrigues could proceed apace below the surface.

For the most part, Nkrumah functioned in splendid isolation, except for subordinates. (And the more inept these were, the more sycophantic to the Osagafeyo.) He took more and more decisions personally, controlled more and more functions of state, built around him the party and government, especially the African and foreign affairs departments, as great appendages of his presidential role: till, elephantine, administration lumbered slowly through its routine bureaucratic procedures, and was prompted into swifter action only by the personal intervention of the president for some special project that made *his* own office more encumbered and labyrinthine than ever. Petty corruption and chicanery abounded; but more damaging by far were the sheer muddle and incompetence. CPP appointees kept their jobs not because they were efficient or trained (there had been little time or opportunity for that) but because they were CPP appointees. They were elevated because they alone were politically trustworthy and because, beside, it was *their* government. Many a ministry with sound enough schemes was assiduously undermined by sheer foolishness and mismanage-

ment on the part of its underlings – or its chiefs. When the army-police government later, for its own purposes, opened the records to scrutiny, it found corruption, true, though not approaching the scale or polish of the big grafters in Nigeria; but more, by far, it uncovered evidence of sheer bungling in the management of the economy and the state.

Intrinsic to the failings of the CPP was Nkrumah's own character, with his limitations as a theoretician and a leader. He saw socialism, and economic development, as a process to be promoted by edict, from the pinnacle of government, by himself, a strong man and charismatic leader. Changing Ghana's social system was a matter of his power and authority. He undertook no close analysis of Ghanaian society and instructed no one else to do so. He published descriptions of imperialism, and of neo-colonialism, and thought that, having identified their purposes, he could prevail against them. His domestic development projects were predicated on the deliberate suppression of an indigenous capitalist class, yet he made his whole economy vulnerable to its infinitely more powerful international counterpart. He lived in a world of paper plans, ministerial and presidential instructions, diagrammatic schemes for Pan-African unity, African high commands, the clandestine sponsorship of radical groups in neighbouring countries addicted to more conservative policies than his own. Many of his schemes were exactly what Ghana and Africa did need; but between the scheme and its execution was a world of woolly thinking. Even where his strategies were sound, he depended on subordinates for their implementation; and, with exceptions here and there, these subordinates were pathetically unequal to their tasks, or reluctant to perform them. As the gulf between presidential purpose and practical execution yawned, till the two resembled one another hardly at all, Nkrumah's estimates of what had been and still could be done grew fiercely unreal. He was physically isolated from life in Ghana; psychologically resistant to unfavourable reports, or even accurate ones; and, towards the end, incapable of making a sound assessment. He dismissed with impatience reports of accelerating economic setbacks. Those around him were given to pessimism of outlook; setbacks were the work of

hostile external forces. Analysis was replaced by a sophisticated form of demonology. Ghana was ringed round by imperialist hostility and intrigue, which alone accounted for failure. Firm revolutionary fervour would defeat them. Meanwhile Nkrumah took no close look at the forces inside Ghana which were ranged against his purpose; and it was these, ultimately, warmed in a climate of general international encouragement, that brought him down.

The fact is that, for all his faults of understanding and leadership, he was less a jailer than a prisoner of the forces around him. He had a very restricted range of political choices. Nkrumah, it has been said,²⁷ had to work within the limitations imposed by the actual character of the party as well as those imposed by the actual character of the state and its institutions.

By the spring of 1965, there was a feeling inside the CPP, and among the social strata it had favoured, that Nkrumah might no longer lead on their terms. New echelons were beginning to join the ranks of the earlier rejected. Inside the party and government, the products of Winneba, in the more assertive role of the 'socialist boys', now that they had reinforcements, were arguing for less adulation of the president and more discussion of the policy. The debate took the form of Nkrumahism versus scientific socialism. Differences seemed at last to take on more ideological forms, and the balance began to tip slightly in favour of the left wing. There were proposals to clean out the TUC and to sweep the party and the ministries with new brooms. Simultaneously the country's economic situation, not least the chaos of the import licence and marketing system, demanded measures that would clearly undermine the entrenched. A commission²⁸ was appointed to scrutinize irregularities in the import licensing (and traders' pass book) system, the havoc in the state-run trading corporations, the soaring costs of local foodstuffs and allegations of racketeering. The findings of the Abrahams Commission were edited out of all recognition to shield big men (and their trader-wives) in party and government who were implicated in speculation and racketeering, but it did publish a list of guilty men and women, and criticized the activities of the 'Queen Mothers' of the food

markets. The commission proposed strict supervision of traders, and their eventual displacement by consumer cooperatives. It proposed the tightening of income tax assessments and collections.

In the rapid capital accumulation required for Ghana's Seven Year Plan, cocoa farmers had borne the main brunt in the expropriation of the surplus. They had become more and more unwilling to postpone immediate consumption to swell state savings. And the urban middle class and the traders felt exactly the same. Post-coup accusations of corruption were all very well. But discontent among the middle class was caused not so much by the presence of corruption, as by the absence of opportunity. The traders and other nascent members of the bourgeoisie fiercely resented the sealing off of certain kinds of profiteering. A tough but frustrated propertied and trading class had always been impatient at the barriers to its growth. By the sound of the new policies, Nkrumah was preparing to contain them even tighter. Nkrumah himself had, after all, risen to power on the fervour and the collections of the traders, especially the market mammys. State shops were not yet driving them out of business, but they were threatening to do so; while the shortage of essential supplies, thanks to the chaos in the system of import licensing, and the need to husband foreign exchange from the import of luxuries, was almost doing the job meanwhile.

When, in 1965, the cold war began to blow through Ghana's trading sector, Ghanaian free enterprise protagonists and Ghana's old-established Western trading partners found themselves close allies. Nkrumah was said to be trying to ease the balance of payments position by switching a third of Ghana's trade- not only cocoa- from West to East. Western interests were alarmed, and not least influential firms like UAC, which envisaged with growing revulsion the prospect of Ghanaian stores stocked high with Bulgarian and Polish canned goods instead of their own. Their counterparts in Ghanaian society were equally agitated. Would the same cuts and commissions operate? For how long would the system of retail trade survive in its old form? What would altered trade patterns do to the trader's opportunity for speculation and profiteering?

The Failure of Politics

By now administrative muddle, speculation with import licensing, trader panic at the prospect of anti-corruption measures and the reduction of trade with the West, began to play havoc with the markets. When news leaked (many of the biggest traders were eminently well connected with ministers) that Ghana's wheat order was to be switched from Canada to the Soviet Union, the traders hoarded overnight, and the price of bread shot up to ₵. a loaf. Matches, and matchets, were at times unobtainable. The soaring cost of living soured memories of the benefits dispensed by the regime. By 1965 it could not yet be said that the CPP excited active opposition in the populace at large; but the trouble was that it found few protagonists or defenders. It was not the masses that toppled the regime at last; but they did not come to its aid.

When it came to organized resistance, there was little to see. The *old* opposition had been jailed, exiled or reduced to political impotence; its conspiracies had grown very spasmodic. The traders were alienated from the CPP, but they took no organized action. There were, however, other important members of the middle-class elite who, if they lacked a party, nevertheless dominated the state in the higher ranks of the administration: civil servants, diplomats, the judiciary, the higher ranks of the army and the police. The tight centralization of government after 1962 made civil servants more important than politicians in many of the secretariats that replaced ministries. Finding socialism, non-alignment, and the single-party state equally abhorrent, the civil service made its opposition felt in silent ways. Leading men abandoned Ghana and sought jobs abroad, to become members of international bodies like the ECA, FAO and others. Others dragged their feet inside the administration. They were not wholly to blame. Most of the ministries were in the hands of incompetent politicians preoccupied with ensuring their stake in party and government. The honest and conscientious administrator was lost in a jungle of precipitate top-level decisions and intrigues. If this was socialism, it should be firmly rejected, they felt. Meanwhile, one could ignore instructions by being negative – like losing directives in a morass of paper.

While the mismanagement of the economy affronted their standards of professional performance as much as the official ideology affronted their background and beliefs, the civil servants, unlike their uniformed colleagues in the army, felt that there was not a great deal they could do. Or was there? Two years before the coup d'etat, a journalist had a revealing conversation with a leading Ghanaian civil servant. He was lamenting the fact that no new enterprise had been started with foreign capital after 1963, and he was convinced that the present state of affairs could not be allowed to continue.

'But what can you do?' the journalist asked. 'You cannot get rid of either your present government or your president in a general election, so long as there is only one party?'

The official smiled broadly, rose, went to the window and looked out in both directions – they were on the ground floor – and returned. 'You must understand, Mr Fergusson,' he said quietly, 'that there are more ways of getting rid of a president than by holding general elections.'

The civil servant was Mr Emmanuel Omaboe, whose appointment as head of Ghana's National Economic Committee was announced the day of the coup.²¹

In the civil service and commercial circles, it was rumoured that Britain was about to cut off all commercial credit after 1 April 1966. Perhaps it was a lever to stop the shift to new trading partners? Perhaps it was only a rumour? When the soldiers struck it was not a month too soon for Ghana's middle class, traders and civil servants, or for its champions abroad.

THE ARMY INJURED

At independence, Ghana's army consisted of three infantry battalions under a British officer corps, with some thirty Ghanaians in the lower ranks. Major-General Henry T. Alexander was appointed chief of defence staff in January 1960. His predecessor, Major-General A. G. V. Paley, had prepared a plan for Africanization of the army by 1970. By the time that General Alexander was relieved of his command in 1961, the terminal year for complete Africanization was 1962, eight years ahead of schedule. By 1966, there were some 600 Ghanaian

officers in the army, the navy and the air force. The Ghanaian army was the largest in West Africa and the eighth largest in all Africa.

Officer cadets were recruited from the secondary schools. And to make the army an attractive proposition, the Nkrumah government raised the pay and fringe benefits of officers to approximate parity with the civil service.³⁰ Thus, by 1961, a newly commissioned second lieutenant received £663 a year; and a college graduate entering the civil service, £680. Two strains of conservatism fused in the officer corps. It identified its attitude and ambition with the upper and middle groups of Ghanaian society; and it was steeped, via Sandhurst, Mons and Eaton Hall officer cadet schools, as well as Hendon Police College and the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, in traditional British army attitudes. Africa's blazing Sandhurstphilia ('I entered Sandhurst as a boy and left a soldier... I loved the companionship of people of identical calling, and the English breakfast... I look back with nostalgia ... it is one of the greatest institutions in the world')³¹ was abnormally exuberant. But the stereotypes held: armies and politics do not mix (a military coup d'etat is the result of the other side mixing the two); a soldier takes his stand on matters of honour and fair play; British-type armies are best, and events in the Congo and Rhodesia had nothing to do with Ghana, for it was only Nkrumah's ambition and appetite for foreign adventures which committed his country on the side of Lumumba or against the declaration of independence by a white settler minority.

Nkrumah has written³² that he always knew the army was not only conservative but potentially disloyal and counter-revolutionary. The ideal course would have been to abolish it, and build instead a people's militia of armed peasants and workers, as in China and Cuba. In fact, Nkrumah's army policy went through the same somersault as the two distinct political phases of Ghana before and after 1966: first leaning heavily Westwards; then trying, though fitfully and largely unsuccessfully, to pull free.

Immediately after independence, Nkrumah maintained the British-commanded, British-type army he had inherited for two

reasons. Without an army, he argued, Ghana would have no influence with other African states. Secondly, he calculated that it was sound security to have an army officered by Britishers: 'The individual loyalties of such officers and their training, combined with the political complications for Britain which would have resulted in their joining a revolt, would have made it unlikely that a military take-over could take place.'³³ The British chief-of-staff would act as a buffer between army and state; and the continued inculcation of British army tradition would inhibit military excursions into civilian affairs. It was a convenient thesis to encourage at the time.

This prescription for Ghana's internal security did not, however, make at the same time for an effective pursuit of Nkrumah's Africa policy. The Congo episode proved this conclusively. Nkrumah believed that the Congo was a turning point in Africa; and that the defence of Lumumba as the head of that country's legitimate government was crucial for the unfettered political independence of the whole continent. It was to defend Lumumba's government that Ghanaian army and police contingents went into the Congo. But once there they fell under United Nations command; and as UN strategy unfolded, it was plain that this would not reinforce but displace Lumumba's government. Ghanaian forces found themselves blocking Lumumba's entry to the radio station in the capital after his dismissal by Kasavubu; and Lumumba wrote bitterly to Nkrumah, renouncing the help of Ghana's troops 'in view of the fact that they are in a state of war against our Republic'.³⁴ Ghana's ambassador in Leopoldville blamed their expatriate commander, General Alexander, for the plummeting of Ghana's popular prestige in the Congo; the Ghanaian military blamed the confused, erratic, and at times ludicrous activities of the Ghanaian diplomats, especially after the Mobutu take-over, for the mounting antagonism of the Congolese. Ghana and its associates in the Casablanca group of African states eventually decided to withdraw their contingents from the Congo, so torn were they between the conflicting purposes of their own and UN policy. Nkrumah, with Alexander's fervent approval, left his contingent at the disposal of the UN.³⁵

The Ghanaian army contingents found the Congo operation a searing experience. They watched the political system of another independent state break down into chaos, Congolese soldiers go on the rampage, and the people whom they had come to the Congo to protect and help boo and hoot at them. The Ghana army there itself experienced serious casualties in one battalion, a mutiny in another, and saw its equipment badly run down. To Afrifa, aG the Congo political operation was 'an unbridled adventure by Nkrumah. . . . We lost lives in struggle which was not ours.' General Alexander could have handled the situation, if only Ghana's politicians had left him alone. Military operations were simple enough; it was the machinations of politicians which led to trouble. General Alexander was frank about his own conflict of loyalties. Was it possible, he asked, for a senior expatriate to hold a high post without finding himself in an impossible position ?³⁷

It was not only the operation inside the Congo that produced the conflict of loyalty. Instructed to strengthen the army intelligence system, General Alexander was disturbed to hear that a consignment of Soviet arms had been unloaded at Takoradi port. His uneasiness was nothing to the consternation of the Americans and British, who were immediately apprehensive that the arms were destined for Gizenga in Stanleyville. Alexander found himself quizzed by a UN representative in the Congo. He made clear that he had tried to dissuade Nkrumah from any such action on Gizenga's behalf: subsequently to discover that Nkrumah had received a report of the conversation via New York. 'Had I been disloyal?' Alexander asked himself.⁹⁸

It was after the Congo operation that Nkrumah made up his mind to dispense with General Alexander and eighty of his fellow British officers. The army command was also deeply hostile at this time to Nkrumah's decision to diversify his sources of arms and training methods, so that Ghana should not have to depend on a single major power for military assistance. During his 1960-61 visit to various socialist states, Nkrumah sent an instruction to General Alexander to select 400 cadets for officer training in the Soviet Union. Alarmed British officers

were emphatic that mixed arms and mixed training made for military nonsense. Said Alexander: 'From the British point of view it was unpleasant to think that a lot of good little Communists were being trained to take their place in Nkrumah's army.'³⁹ On the day that General Alexander wrote to Colonel Ankrah,⁴⁰ then on service in the Congo and later head of Ghana's army government, that the affair of the cadets might mean that he could not continue to help the Ghanaian army, Nkrumah summoned the general to hand him his letter of dismissal. Alexander left the president's office walking side by side with his successor, Brigadier S. J. A. Otu, who turned to him and said: 'General, excuse me for bothering you at this time, but can you possibly lend me some major-general's insignia?' Otu took over the insignia, and, with his fellow-members of the officer corps, allegiance to the customary ways of the British-trained army. (Eventually only sixty-eight cadets were found for the course in the Soviet Union; the cream of the year's complement of eligible school-leavers had already been skimmed off for Britain and the military at Teshie.) There were other sources of discord between government and army. The new constitution of 1960 made the president also supreme commander, chairman of the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staffs Committee, with powers to dismiss or suspend military personnel; to call up reserve forces and integrate them in to the regular forces and generally to control the army. In 1962 the officer course at the military academy was shortened in order to produce more graduates; this may have offended the military's sense of professional standards.⁴¹ There was government intervention in the selection of personnel to be sent abroad for military training. In 1962 an Armed Forces Bureau was opened, as part of a civic education programme, to engage the officer corps in discussions on current affairs and the military's role in economic development. The military was unenthusiastic about the project, if not visibly resistant. But the Bureau soon became moribund.

It was after the assassination attempts – the bomb explosion at Kulungugu in August 1962, followed by the Flagstaff House attempt and several bomb incidents in Accra – that Nkrumah

began to take drastic steps against army and police. The assassination attempts inaugurated internal struggles within the CPP, and also loyalty probes in the party and police. Nkrumah came to believe, and Police Chief John Hartley is only too ready these days to confirm, that the police chiefs were actively plotting counter-revolution.⁴² At least, if they were not fellow-conspirators, they were allies by inefficiency, the evidence seems to show. How else explain the trail of police and intelligence incompetence running through their investigation of successive plots? In the Kulungugu attack, directed by United Party conspirators operating from Togo, an army sergeant suspected of providing the grenades died in a fall from police headquarters. In the January 1964 assassination attempt on Nkrumah's life, Police Constable Amatewee had been newly appointed to guard duty at Flagstaff House; who was responsible for the posting, and who promised him £2,000 if he got his man?⁴³ None of this was ever revealed. Nkrumah used the Flagstaff House attempt to lop off the heads of the police force. Within a week, the nine most senior police chiefs had disappeared into preventive detention. This drastic surgery resulted in the promotion of John Harlley as Police Commissioner. Harlley now claims that he had been plotting Nkrumah's downfall for years, and that he escaped detention largely because he was promoted to a better vantage point for subversion and his private counter-security. Was it coincidence alone that Harlley, as head of the Special Branch, had investigated the January 1964 affair; and that while the evidence he gathered implicated the top nine senior police officials, it was Harlley himself who, as tenth senior officer, then found himself head of the force? After 1964 there were far-reaching security changes. The police force was disarmed; the Special Branch was removed from police control; the customs and border guards were put on a para-military basis but also removed from police control. Military intelligence was organized in such a way that while not cut off altogether from the army, it was integrated in the security services run from the president's office.⁴⁴ It was during this period that Harlley illegally established his own secret intelligence apparatus, with Anthony Deku as one of his operators.⁴⁵

At the same time the army was being inflamed by the reorganization of the Presidential Guard. Originally the President's Guard Regiment had been established by General Alexander as a relief tour from duty in the Congo, for old soldiers no longer fit for the field. Its members were drawn from regular army units and had at first been under army command. In 1963, under Soviet security advice, Nkrumah transformed the force into the President's Own Guard Regiment (P O G R) and laid plans to extend it to two battalions for ceremonial duties, but also for security work. In 1964 the order was given to raise the size of the Guard by another regiment. ('By February 1966 it was fortunate for us that only two companies had been raised for the new battalion.') At the time of the coup the P O G R had grown to fifty officers and 1,142 men, armed in part with Soviet weapons and assisted by Soviet security advisers.⁴⁶ By then the P O G R had been detached from the army command, and made directly responsible to Nkrumah, under the command of Captain Zanlerigu. This was the so-called 'private army' which, more than any other single grievance, ignited the military into coup d'etat action. Immediately after the coup, General Ankrah broadcast the vastly overstated plaint:

Massive sums of money were spent every month to maintain an unnecessarily large force of so-called security officers whose duty is ostensibly to provide for the security of the state but really to secure Nkrumah's own personal safety. He established a private army of his own at annual costs of over £500,000 in flagrant violation of a constitution which he himself had foisted on the country to serve as a counterpoise to the Ghana Armed forces.⁴⁷

Major A. K. Ocran echoed it in even more alarmist terms: 'The obvious intention was that the army would die off in course of time and be replaced by the P O G R.'⁴⁸

By 1963, there was wrangling over protocol between the Guard Regiment and the regular army. The Guard Regiment commander maintained that he received his orders direct from Flagstaff House. The commander refused to pay compliments to the Chief of Defence Staff on one occasion – when China's Premier Chou En-lai was seen off at the airport – and Ocran wrote the letter of complaint. 'In a country where there is only

one Major-General, it does not look nice in the public eye for him to be ignored completely by troops on parade.⁴⁹ In January 1966 staff officers were summoned to Flagstaff House to a meeting to work out conditions covering the Guard Regiment. It was made final that the Chief of Defence Staff should have nothing to do with the Guard Regiment, 'which had for all purposes become part of Flagstaff House and of the House-hold'.⁵⁰

Army hackles rose next at the retirement of Major-General Otu, Chief of Defence Staff, and his deputy, Major-General Ankrah, in August 1965. Ghana, complained Mrifa, was informed that they had been retired, but most in the army knew they had been dismissed – this was not the way to treat generals.⁵¹ In their places, were appointed Generals Aferi and Barwah. Subsequently, the Ankrah-Otu dismissals were explained by the fact that a coup had been timed for Nkrumah's absence at the Commonwealth Premiers' Conference in London in 1965. The attempt had to be called off at the last minute when Brigadier Hassan, director of military intelligence, got wind of it. It was when rumours of the abortive plot began to reverberate round Accra that Nkrumah got rid of the two generals. In the reshuffle that followed the installation of new commanders, Major Kotoka, who was to be principal army coup-maker soon afterwards, was made a full colonel and sent to Kumasi in the North, to replace Meri as commander of 2 Brigade.

By this time, there was a state of general unease in the officer corps. There was admiration for the soldiering qualities of army commander General C. M. Barwah, but resentment that he was in Nkrumah's special confidence, and was used for special assignments (though the post-coup charge that he alone knew of the existence of training camps for freedom fighters is patently false; top police officers knew of them, too). There was suspicion that he saw no conflict in serving both Nkrumah and the army, for Barwah cooperated with the scheme to introduce political education into the army. Kotoka himself felt that he had no future under Nkrumah. It was common talk that he and army commander Barwah did not get on with one another. The

monthly intelligence report in November 1965 accused Kotoka of a deliberate attempt to transfer Ewe officers into 2 Brigade. The accusation was later formally withdrawn, but the suspicion of Kotoka's favouritism towards the Ewe persisted. Afrifa has disclosed that he sensed Kotoka was in danger of being removed from his command, for a senior officer of the Military Academy and Training Schools who was married to the daughter of an important official of the National Council of Ghana Women. ('Fortunately this was not to be.'⁵²)

Army shortages were blamed not on balance of payments difficulties, but on the preferential treatment of the POGR. 'The pride of the regular soldier was hurt,' wrote General Ocran. 'There was no boot polish available; of the armoured vehicles only four in ten were roadworthy by 1966.'⁵³ By Christmas 1965, Afrifa wrote in his account, the troops lacked equipment and clothing, things essential for the pride, morale and efficiency of the soldier. Shortages were said to be due to a rash expansion scheme to meet the challenge of white Rhodesia's UDI in November 1965. Afrifa wrote, 'I personally knew that Her Majesty's Government was quite capable of dealing with the Rhodesia situation. I felt that Nkrumah was making too much noise about the whole issue, especially by raising the people's militia....' * Furthermore I do not know why we should have been fighting.' Ocran has written: 'Why did Nkrumah want to send troops to Rhodesia ? The Africans there should fight their own battles as a first step, or risk being treated like the aborigines of other countries. Fighting your own wars is a cleansing experience through which our brothers south will have to go.'⁵⁴ By the end of 1965 and the beginning of 1966 it was by no means certain that Ghana would commit herself to any Rhodesian action – Chief of Defence Staff Aferi was still to go on an OAU reconnaissance mission, but it was already becoming obvious that African belligerence on this issue would evaporate into hot air. It was merely a convenient pretext for an army that acted to preserve its own status, and that made a

* The People's Mjlitia started to be formed in December 1965. It was more talked about than seen. It was said to be on Chinese advice that the militia be formed.

The Failure of Politics

case for the legitimacy of its action out of prevailing political and economic currents of discontent.

For all its declarations in defence of liberty - and the economic growth rate* - and against tyranny, the Ghanaian army struck only when it itself was affected by the regime. The coup was an act of self-defence by members of an army and police command under suspicion and fearful of having their powers stripped from them. The army as a corporate body felt under attack; but so especially did the leading participants in the coup, and their role in defence of their individual professional careers was probably paramount.

The failure of politics in Ghana was a failure on the part of Nkrumah to elucidate a strategy for the social changes which would have made a breaking of Ghana's dependency possible. But of no less importance was his related failure to consolidate forces around him and his regime for necessary social change. Military coups in Africa succeed less through the power they muster than through the power that popular indifference fails to muster against them. The CPP was ineffective except as a battleground for opposing factions. Nkrumah himself was solitary in government. Castro in Cuba, subjected to an even tighter external containment, consolidated about him young Cuban activists who enlivened the party and its contact with the people. In Ghana, the regime alienated those who hoped to improve their personal and political fortunes by independence; but it did not disarm them, or displace their influence.

Ghana's social structure was not basically different from that of Nigeria - and other West African states or indeed African states in general - and the middle-class elites which acted not to

*It was unthinkable, said General Kotoka on take-over day, that Ghana's economy had developed in the previous three years at the rate of only 3 per cent per annum. In phrases like 'The myth of Nkrumah has been broken' the NLC statement sounds to some ears very non-inrugenous; some said it had been drafted with the help of a British information officer, a former rustriect commissioner who was much in evidence on coup day, but this has not been substantiated.

Ghana: Heirs Jump the Queue

assert but to impede Nkrumah's purposes were the very forces in Nigeria which, in their scramble for office and privilege, strained the political system to breaking point. Army officers, once again, acted to conserve the independence, or the 'neutrality' of the army; but because the army, far from being neutral, was infected by the country's larger divisions, its intervention in politics was bound to sharpen them.

In the Sudan, too, the army reflected the country's divisions: on the one hand, between the parties and religious organizations of the traditional rulers in the countryside, and the commercial interests of the towns; and, on the other, between the political parties of both these groups and younger Sudanese, who expected independence not to further the interest of the privileged groups and politicians, but the country as a whole. When the army command struck to defend particular men in power, the action was bound to divide the army