

Africa: The Second Revolution

284

by Adrian Hastings

To the European outsider the achievement of political independence in the last few years by most of the countries of Africa may appear as the ending of a story: the story of European colonisation and overseas rule, and the story of the nationalist struggle for freedom. As these are now over, it is presumed that conditions of stability must have been established, and that an era of uneventful development is about to ensue. When there is instead a revolution or other disturbance, one easily concludes that the country in question was not after all ready for independence. In the hands of a John Biggs Davison or a Patrick Wall every apparent deviation from western normality becomes one more item in a terrible catalogue of the sins of independent Africa: a ghastly warning which the white leadership of Rhodesia and the South are only too right to heed. This view does, of course, work on the curious supposition that a people not possessing economic and political stability should, *ipso facto*, be ruled by someone else. It seems to me that approaches of this kind to what is going on in Africa today present us with a dangerously false focus, implying as they do that the acquiring of independence should have marked the term rather than be the condition for the great process of building the new society. In fact it is that process which is going on now and I find it far more interesting than what happened before independence, but it is of its nature something which involves instability, tension and the immaturity which is inevitable when people are just beginning to face, collectively and individually, a wide range of new situations and problems. All these things are well worth putting up with for the exhilaration of being no longer in tutelage and having the world before one, and anyone who wants to approach the African situation from the inside needs to share in that exhilaration.

Stability in a state is not obtained by the acceptance of a balanced paper constitution, but by the working out of a balance of power between the various elements in its society, and this is bound to take time to emerge. It was to be expected that in one form or another the post-independence epoch of African history would prove to be more revolutionary than the age which went before it, and this is not a cause for reproaches. Nations like individuals have to go through things for themselves, and there is much, both good and bad, that cannot be experienced under foreign control. The declaration of Independence is not then the sign that the time when a nation is

obtaining its fundamental experience in the social, political, cultural, religious fields is over, but rather that it can now begin, and the gaining of this experience may be a costly affair. If we chopped off the heads of kings and archbishops in our golden constitutional age of the seventeenth century, without presumably forfeiting the right to be independent, we should not be surprised if things happen in a new country which would not take place in the matured and weary atmosphere of Westminster. Pride's Purge does not show that constitutional freedom had no lovers and no future in seventeenth-century England, nor do Nkrumah's most dictatorial acts show that it has none in today's Ghana.

The coming of independence to the particular African territories which existed prior to independence has done no more than set the stage for a vast process of evolutionary and revolutionary change, whose political element is not the most important. The deeper revolutions are economic and mental. Without them political independence may bring, as it did in Liberia, only stagnation. But equally, without political independence, all the rest would turn sour and lack the necessary thrust from within. In fact they need to go together. Politics get more into the news, but behind them are great forces, inexorably changing the face of Africa, forces whose effects can be moulded in a variety of ways, but which cannot be denied or held back. There is, first of all, the population increase; secondly a staggering expansion of schools and universities; thirdly, wider than this, though obviously closely linked to it, the mental revolution in horizons, in criteria of assessment, in expectations; fourthly, and wider still, the economic revolution in production, consumption, living standards. The political revolution of the last seven years is the curtain raiser for a social revolution that is still only beginning, but which is bound to bring with it further political change and upheaval.

Nevertheless the political revolution that has replaced white control by black in most parts of the continent has had a particular character which is bound to influence future developments considerably. For one thing it has been with some exceptions, a very peaceful change-over. One might perhaps regret this. A nation may value its freedom and independence more because of the struggle it has had to gain these things. The struggle welds the nation; for the most part the new countries of Africa have had little of this. Countries like Tanzania and Uganda will have no epic freedom fight to look back upon: no Easter 1916, no storming of the Bastille, no martyrs for freedom. Will a future struggle with South Africa supply this lack, and most terribly?

In most countries the anti-colonial campaign cannot be said to have seared the nation's soul or produced a saga whose common possession would help unify the country. What is remarkable is how much sense of unity countries like Tanzania have nevertheless

developed. Nor does a gentle advance through conferences at Lancaster House and a series of agreed constitutions help to stimulate the muses. It is the tension and emotions of conflict and resistance to tyranny rather than a regime of careful reasonableness which excite artistic creation and it may well be that the Africans of South Africa will produce from their more bitter experience far the richer literature as also a national saga that their descendants will never forget. Suffering can bring with it a compensation in maturity.

Yet it is obvious how good are the effects of the mildness with which independence has arrived in most parts of Africa. One is the friendliness which persists between the new nations and their former colonisers, and makes it possible for European expatriates to continue making a very real contribution to the growing life of these countries. Another is the tradition of moderation in the ways of ruling which is already characteristic of a number of the better known African states.

The political revolution and the emergence of some thirty new independent states from Senegal in the West to Somali in the East seems now to have consecrated a series of often rather artificial frontiers, which are going to be extremely difficult to change. Throughout the Continent frontiers cut ancient peoples into two, yet it is striking that nowhere do the new states seem prepared to consider frontier changes however reasonable claims for cession may be in the light of traditional African history or ethnology, and however much the frontiers to be defended today are due to the greed or ignorance of European politicians of the late last century. The politicians are not only true to character but probably wise in this, for once changes began there would be no end to them and the difficulty of relating political to ethnic and cultural frontiers can be overwhelming; but remembering how considerable was the discontent over the territorial division of tribes in the past, it seems strange how easily the colonial pattern has in fact been accepted by dominant African public opinion.

Similarly, the earlier urge for the wider federation of states, on a regional or even continental basis, has greatly diminished with the grasping of the fruits of local independence. It is clear, for instance, how much less anxious the rulers of three states of East Africa are for federation now than they appeared a few years ago. These two things go together and point to a very important phenomenon which is that almost everywhere a new leadership has emerged, is hardening, and in doing so is identifying itself with the *status quo*, a position which seems best to guarantee its own continuance in the exact form to which it has become accustomed.

This new leadership represents a certain group of people, mostly fairly young, who were ready to occupy the leading positions in each state about the time of independence. They have entered into the establishment somewhat as an age-group, replacing not their elders

but expatriates. They had a short apprenticeship but can naturally look forward to a long tenure of their position of power and they will not, collectively or individually, be easy to move. Their corporate emergence is related too to economic and educational factors.

It is doubtful whether at present the economic growth of most countries of Africa is comparable in pace with the other developments – those of population increase, education, and mental attitudes – and this may well have a decisive effect on social stability. At present there is a rather thin layer of economic development spread wide (represented on the production side by a cash crop, on the consumption side by bread, wirelesses, etc.), and there is a thick wedge spread very narrowly. That thick wedge is one of industrial development and of key salaried posts in commerce, government and the professions. Both these things follow a closely western pattern. Industry is limited to a very few places, and if it raises the Gross National Product inevitably does so chiefly to the advantage of a very small section of the community. Much economic advance in Africa hardly affects the ‘under-development’ of society as a whole, at least in the present phase. It rather tends to enhance a ‘dual economy’: a very small sector of opulence unconnected with a surrounding field of indigence. The same thing can come about in the professional and political fields. The salary scales of teachers, government servants and company executives are those first given to expatriates, and are therefore geared to the economy of a west European society. Their (doubtless inevitable) continuation after africanisation further contributes to a state of imbalance between the tiny few who may now live on the economic level of the British middle class and the rest, though it is true as well that clan and family solidarity often does much to redistribute the high salary of the successful individual over a wide range of relatives.

This pattern of a dual economy is in some way related to that of higher education as it existed in the years before independence. The academic ladder proceeded to the very top: to Makerere, Ibadan, Achimota, and even to London and Oxford, but in its upper rungs it was trod by very few. Secondary schools had a very small intake: the difference between the numbers in primaries and the numbers in secondaries being very striking. An elite was certainly formed, and it was that elite which took over the country at independence and guaranteed stability and continuity. Inheriting the benefits it could have no desire to upset the system which produced them. It is interesting to compare this with the situation in the Congo, where no such elite had been formed, and independence was followed by chaos. No one had been equipped for leadership at a more than local level, and no one really perceived *himself* to have a vested interest in preserving order. In British Africa this was not so. There was a double basis of leadership and of vested interest: old tribal and new western, and both were present during the change over, generally ensuring

stability. As regards the first: great tribal chieftainships remained powerful in many places – Ashanti, northern Nigeria, Central and western Uganda, Barotseland, and elsewhere, whereas they had been eliminated in the Congo (though not, of course, in Rwanda and Burundi). After years of integration into the British system, these chieftainships – the most African elements in the African power heaven of today – have generally stood out rather strikingly for a continuation of the system of the late colonial period. Anyway they, like the new elite, worked for continuity and stability in the period of power transition.

After independence the first clash for leadership between Africans in the new societies has often appeared as one between these two groups – those possessing traditional tribal authority and the ‘new man’. Where the political units involved were not tribal, but inter-tribal ones, and therefore a naked appeal to tribal authority would bring about the disintegration of the new states, it has been the new men, who – across western electoral practice – have inherited the central reins of power from the European inter-tribal authority, and who have generally seemed to triumph in the first struggles for leadership. However, this sort of clash is far less meaningful than might appear and in many places it has – at least as yet – hardly taken place at all. The reason is simple. The new leaders are often recruited from the ranks of the old, and may even be identical with them, as in northern Nigeria. How many prime ministers of Burundi have been members of the royal family! It is perfectly understandable that it was the chiefly families who first sent their sons for higher education and subsequently occupied the better positions in the new governing class as they appeared. In very many places there is a close family continuity between those possessing the traditional tribal authority and those who have come to the top across a political party and the process of elections. And this is surely what anyone who knows something of the historical composition of the British House of Commons might well expect. To a considerable extent, then, the traditional hierarchy has hitherto effectively retained its grasp while adapting itself to certain external western patterns of government. In such cases more genuinely radical elements have been simply squeezed out.

Where there has been sharp leadership conflict between the new and the old, it has been more often an inter-tribal one, than an inter-class one within a single tribe. That is to say, either one tribe has feared domination by others within an inter-tribal state and its more old-fashioned elements have countered with a separatism centred upon traditional tribal authority, or – as in Rwanda and Zanzibar – the traditional rulers were identified with a privileged minority lording it over a tribally differentiated majority, and the coming of modernisation almost inevitably brought with it a revolution at once social and political. It was clearly the fault of the

colonising power in these cases to leave largely undisturbed a situation of outdated minority privilege which could so easily lead to violent revolution.

For the most part the leadership that took over at independence in African countries was then a composite of old and new, with both plenty of reason for desiring stability and the strength to maintain it. There was usually nothing very revolutionary about most of this leadership, except the racial change – it was a replacing of white by black. It was, of course, committed to pressing on with national development, but its general character – though naturally open to much new blood – tends towards that of an oligarchy, in which, behind a modern constitution, traditionally important families often continue to be highly influential. Such an establishment can become identified with the social and political *status quo*, while its desire for security provides much of the reality behind the formula of the one-party state. Its prophets – Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Nyerere, – remain, but the general regime which surrounds them appears as one more concerned with power than with ideology.

We can see then that in Africa today the political revolution of the last few years has produced in the lines of territory, institution and personnel, regimes of some stability, based upon a power group whose emergence is not only political but is related to the economic and educational pattern of the years around independence. With some observers it is the custom today to condemn the current African leadership as selfish, cut off from the common people, and so on. Doubtless there is some truth in such criticisms, as there always is of governing groups, but I am not trying to make a moral point here. I want simply to outline a certain, very important social phenomenon, and, one may add, an inevitable one. Revolutions are nearly always made by minorities, and countries moving away from a very simple rural economy are inevitably led by minorities, and ruling minorities invariably look largely to their own interests. It is enough that this group represents the obvious natural rulers of their countries and that the gains of the few must spread across to the many.

But if the emergence of this group, riding the first wave of independence, is one social fact, the development of a far wider revolution, whose manifestation can only come little by little, but which, in re-shaping African society in a titanic fashion, is obviously not going to leave the cosy world of the original revolution and its leadership unscathed, is another.¹ New leadership problems are sure to arise soon – indeed in some countries, they are already doing so – and they will be closely related to the elements of stability and instability in society and to the locality of its growth points. It is important to analyse these problems, seeing how far leadership conflicts and the appearance of elements of instability may be

¹This article was written before the coup in Nigeria (Ed.).

basically due, for instance, not to communist infiltration, the perversity and immaturity of Africans, or any cause other than an almost necessary evolution society is bound to undergo in the coming years. An approach of this kind might help to prevent too hasty ideological judgments on what is going on or the facile identification of the Church, or Western civilisation, or the Christian cause, etc., with any particular regime or power group.

In all independent African countries today a very high proportion of total government expenditure is being devoted to education and there is an enormous increase in the number of those studying at all levels, but particularly at higher ones. Thus, in Uganda, whereas in 1960 only three or four schools were preparing some hundred students for A levels, there are now over twenty preparing some thousands of students. There is similar expansion everywhere and it continues at post-secondary level. Instead of the few cautiously developed university colleges colonial governments provided, there is now a whole spate of rapidly expanding ones. Nigeria alone has five universities. New ones spring up yearly across east and central Africa to join the original trio of Makerere, Lovanium and Salisbury: Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Elizabethville, Stanleyville, Busumbura, Kabgaye, Lusaka, Blantyre . . . Moreover, there are literally thousands of Africans undertaking university studies in this country, and thousands of others in the U.S., Russia, etc. Below these are the tens of thousands who have fallen from the race, but have obtained eight, ten, or more years of formal education, who no longer feel satisfied with village life and drift elsewhere, providing what is perhaps the greatest single worry for African governments today. This is obviously much stimulated by the rapid increase of population: the traditional village often simply cannot absorb so many young people.

But neither can the towns. In general the economy is not developing comparably with education and there is a real danger that higher education – especially if it is incomplete – will come to put people out of a job, rather than into one. This is especially true as so little of the educational effort is directed towards a trade or craft. It is academic, geared to professional work or to the white-collar jobs of an advanced industrial society; but that society hardly as yet exists in Africa. It is a striking fact that in Britain, and in Europe generally, in the nineteenth century, industrialisation came first, mass education second. In most of Africa it is the other way round. It is far easier to extend an advanced system of education than an advanced economy, and the present enormous educational expansion could well become a source of frustration. Such a situation can make good potential for revolution.

One might distinguish, very roughly, four social groups in the new Africa. The first, still by far the biggest, including most adults and many of the young: those still almost unaffected by modernisation;

the village people, including those with up to some four years of schooling; this is the basic element in every African state, which are all still predominantly rural. The majority of the population, it has as yet gained little economically, politically, or educationally, from the last few years. But at least most of its young members are affected to some extent by the revolution in expectations. The radio is impinging on their existence. Tribal absolutes are crumbling.

Secondly, the horde of young people who have finished primary school and may have something more – five to ten years of education. They have failed to reach their school certificate, and many have not really qualified to do anything, though they have picked up more than a smattering of English, maybe the ability to drive and mend a car, and so on. Very many of these can no longer settle down in the old society, and there may be hardly room for them anyway. They drift into the towns, their numbers increasing by leaps and bounds. Many are out of work, many take to crime. They can be a worry both for the government and for the churches.

Thirdly, there are the new educated, now beginning to pour out of universities and high schools of one kind and another. There are many jobs waiting for them, for even government departments still have many Europeans on their staffs, for want of Africans. Business – the big companies, the banks – are equally anxious to africanise. Then there are the schools, at secondary level still largely European run. Nevertheless, the best jobs, the jobs at the very top, have already been taken and are not likely to be vacated. The system is filling up.

Fourthly, there is the group which we have already considered: those in possession. The men who came to office and power at, or shortly after, independence, and who represent many of them, the traditional chiefly families. It was not a numerous group, which helps to explain why opposition parties, existent at independence, have mostly shrivelled up. There were few if any ideological differences to justify more than one party, and not enough people to man the government side let alone an opposition. Many of those in power have not nearly so thorough an education as the latest generation are now receiving, but they were on the spot at the right moment when someone needed to be appointed, and there they hope to stay. Evidently there is much room for new recruits. Our third and fourth groups are hardly yet distinguished. There are still many posts to be africanised; still plenty of room for preferment. Hence there is little dissatisfaction as yet on the part of those wanting to get in with those already in, but it is already noticeable in some places, such as the Congo, where there is a particularly wide gap of education between the immediate heirs of independence and the men trained since, and it is likely to grow elsewhere.

The one group had looked for independence, received it, and can personally enjoy all that it has brought about. Some of them were

born to the purple and in spite of their enthusiasm for development, they can quickly come to represent a basically conservative attitude of local entrenchment and maintenance of the *status quo*. Not only East African Federation but even the up till now existing East African Common Services Organisation would seem already to be falling a victim to such an attitude, to what Mr Ibingira – a Ugandan politician – shrewdly pinpointed as ‘the protection of ones personal position’ and ‘the power mechanics’ of the existing parties. However, if a few years ago Africa herself might truly have been called a very conservative continent, this is becoming less true every year. Chou En Lai had a good deal of reason when he said recently that he found a situation ‘ripe for revolution’, and that must mean revolution against the regimes which have settled in since independence. We can now see why. Quite apart from the particular tribal or racial conflicts which have caused revolution in Rwanda and Zanzibar and which – with a different tune – make South Africa fundamentally unstable, the effect of a population growth which may actually be larger than that of the economy, and of a spread of education poorly geared to the immediate needs of society; rapid urbanisation and the emergence of an under-employed urban mob of youth – the sort that worries Kenyatta in Nairobi; the revolution in expectations that the preaching of nationalism, the coming of independence, and the steady voice of the radio have brought about; the growing gap between a small group that has enormously profited by changes and the masses that have gained little; and finally, the arrival, more noticeable every year, of a quickly growing set of young men more highly educated but more plebeian than their predecessors, less involved with the struggle for independence because they can take it for granted, still on the make, open to conviction that the good of their countries is to be found in solutions of every kind, and even that the immediate heirs of the nationalist revolution may be betraying its deeper aspirations: all this explains Mr Chou En Lai’s revolutionary situation.

If the opposition parties of the years around independence have mostly disappeared, there is material here for new ones; or where an entrenched establishment unwisely no longer permits legal opposition, for revolution. What one might describe as the hitherto monolithic attitude of educated Africans is, then, coming to disappear. Just as the average Irishman of the nineteenth century could concentrate on little but liberation, so the educated African of the 1950’s was heading towards one thing: independence, freedom. That being attained, unity of approach quite naturally tends to fade away. Ghana, the first independent country, provides us at once with a classic example. Dr Busia, Gbedemah, Adamfio . . . one after another old allies in the freedom struggle have broken with Dr. Nkrumah. That need not surprise one. Compare Cromwell’s career, the parting of the ways with Hyde, Lilburne, the Levellers, Sir Harry Vane . . .

Ghanaians are today deeply divided, and even Dr Nyerere finds it necessary to keep a number of Tanzania's most distinguished citizens in detention without trial. I had a great friend from Togo, a most charming person, who hated European rule and all the selfishness, inadequacies, ruthlessness of government, which he attributed to the European character. He believed in Africa and was sure that once Africans were allowed to rule themselves, all that would disappear. I thought of him sadly the day President Olympio of Togo was assassinated. I am told that all copies of *Animal Farm* have been confiscated from Ghanaian schools: the new generation of students was applying the moral too close to home. In Africa, as has happened elsewhere so many times before, the simplicity, the unanimity, the spontaneous conviction of a first movement is passing, as it is bound to pass. A new generation is emerging, already open to disillusionment with the power and politics of the establishment. All this is really a sign of growing up and the consequent inevitable discovery that things are more complicated and less susceptible to solution, original sin more all pervasive, than one had thought.

It is obvious that in this situation Marxism has an enormous attraction. Traditional Africa – very religious, very rural – could not so easily be touched by it, but exactly in the measure that education and urbanisation break up the old shape of things, reveal the total backwardness of the whole continent in terms of Europe or America, and create a mood of dissatisfaction among the young, whether educated or half-educated, so will Marxism and the example of China appeal as a fine way out for members of the third world.

A way out, but not necessarily the only one. The whole point is that the new generation of African students, freed from the monopolising claims of independence seeking, can enter more easily than their predecessors into the whole complicated dialogue of the modern world, in which Marxism is one voice, but in which there are others too, and among them Catholicism. Entry into this general dialogue is still of course being partially, and with some wholly, impeded by world wide colour tensions and the particular issues of South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portuguese Africa. Basically we can call these things irrelevant to the internal problems of the new Africa, but they are left overs far too large to ignore, quite capable of masking the real issues and problems facing African societies today and of driving everyone back into racial attitudes as soul-destroying for the black man as for the white. Obviously such issues can raise enormous emotional power, and when raised will recreate, temporarily, the black world's unity of mind and purpose. Indeed, perhaps the greatest question mark facing Africa today is whether she will be able to develop according to the real internal needs of her society and an open participation in world civilisation, or whether she will be forced both by the South and by racial discrimination elsewhere into a crusade whose dimensions it would be hard to foretell, but which

might blight the whole social and mental growth of the continent.

Already today, however, it is basically mistaken to look on the internal events of independent Africa through the glasses of colonialism and anti-colonialism, just as it is mistaken to look on every sign of unrest as evidence of a great communist plot, or to be for ever glimpsing white civilisation grappling with barbarism . . . all such interpretations are fundamentally misleading, the troubles that are bound to occur in post independence Africa being basically due, not to the subtle machinations of communists, nor to the inability of Africans to govern themselves, nor again to neo-colonialism, but to the forces of social and mental change operating at high pressure in a situation that is still very fluid. Some troubles are directly due to tribal rivalry, but I have tried to show how others may arise in a clash between generations, between a Whiggish establishment with strong traditional roots which grasped power and means to retain it, and a younger generation far more open to radical ideas. To put it like that is, inevitably, to simplify, but it does indicate roughly a pattern that is emerging. A wise government may be able to avoid it, both by keeping the doors of the establishment well open for people to enter and for people to fall out, and by its ability to maintain a convincing ideological lead that will satisfy the younger generation (Nkrumah and Nyerere are clearly aware of both these needs), but where there is failure to do this and serious conflict develops between a dug in, basically conservative group of 'haves' and a new more revolutionary group of younger men deeply dissatisfied with what independence has in fact brought, it would indeed be disastrous if – as could so easily happen – the Church let herself side with the present power group, and the forces pressing for a more radical revolution became identified as Marxist. We have to prevent social cleavages, whose basic character is in no way ideological, being interpreted in ideological terms. As a matter of fact communists are adept at identifying themselves with movements destined to triumph, and Catholics seem to do the same with regimes doomed to pass away! We often do so because we fail to analyse a given situation and to recognise the inevitability of change.

To get back from these rather general considerations, a care for what is spiritual and a care for freedom, for the way of consent not that of external imposition, are two concerns which touch many Africans very deeply. Neither leads to Marxism. If some form of totalitarianism has its advocates in Africa today, so has parliamentary democracy; and so have many intermediate attitudes. Patrick Lumumba is one political martyr of these years, but Dr Danuah is another. Again, the school education of Africa has been in mission hands – Catholic and Protestant – and if some real appreciation of western values, Christian and humanist, has not been communicated, we must indeed be quite extraordinarily bad educators. Independence came first; that achieved, there is much else to master, and the

young African today is more and more aware of it. Beyond the political kingdom, are there not others? The kingdom of sport, of literature, of original scientific work, of God? I feel that African students today have the chance to be interested in a far wider range of subjects than their predecessors, and can come to hold a wider range of attitudes. They have entered into the complex, many-opinioned twentieth-century world after the simplicity of the quiet village, the simplicity too of the old nationalism; they have entered our world more completely than ever before, and the first way we can help them, and the best, is by simply sharing with them our interests, enthusiasms, troubles, faith. There is one society, and we are all of it. The great crime of South Africa and Rhodesia is to deny the human community, while it must be our chief duty to express it.

Within it we have the further supernatural community of the Catholic Church. A very high proportion of the young educated class of Africa is Catholic, by baptism, by school, by some continued loyalty, but few have as yet obtained much sense of having a sure and positive place in the Church. The Church was not shaped in Africa with such people in mind: still largely determined by what was judged suitable for the assault upon tribal society, her character has been authoritative and fidelistic. The conditions of today require of her a new suppleness, the provision of machinery for dialogue, an approach which does not stifle or alienate the person trained to think in the categories of the modern world and the secular university. The situation of today, as we have analysed it, is one in which many such people will be increasingly ready to hear the Church's voice and give her a committed loyalty, entering really responsibly into her corporate life, if they are shown confidence and given the opportunity. It is certainly upon the educated elite of the post-independence generation that the fate of the Church and all that it signifies in Africa will largely depend.