

Internal note from the Commonwealth Relations Office on the future of the Gold Coast after independence (19 August 1955)

Caption: On 19 August 1955, Francis Cumming-Bruce, a British diplomat in the Commonwealth Relations Office, drafts a highly critical internal note on the political and economic future of the Gold Coast after independence. The note examines the various factors that threaten the country's short-term stability and particularly highlights weaknesses in the existing local administration and political structures. It also looks at the nature of future relations between the United Kingdom and the Gold Coast.

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NOTES ON THE FUTURE GOLD COAST
SCENE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EXTERNAL
RELATIONS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

(Sent to the C.R.O. 19.8.55)

A. LONG TERM PROSPECTS

Future Internal Progress

The Gold Coast is so immature, and the unification of the country so recent, that it will be difficult after independence to maintain reasonably efficient government and cohesion. But the long-term trends are likely to be in the right direction provided the first ten years after independence do not see a breakdown.

2. In the first few years after independence her course is likely to be unsteady, progress is likely to be slow, and relapse in some fields inevitable, e.g. in the integrity of public service. Developments during this period are likely to determine her future for a disproportionate subsequent length of time. If the position can be held for 15 years our postwar Africanisation policy will have then yielded an adequate number of Africans for senior Government posts.

Political Stability

3. Politically the country faces a period of instability. It will be within the power of Government to keep the situation under control, if the party in power proves capable of exercising restraint towards its opponents and learns how to handle law and order, and if administration is maintained at a reasonable standard. There is a fair chance that these conditions will be fulfilled, if a means should be found to facilitate future employment by the Gold Coast of good British personnel. If not, the Government's grip on the country may progressively relax.

4. The good record of African Ministers is largely due to the personal influence of the Governor, the unprecedented amount of money in the Government's hands from the cocoa boom, and the absence of serious problems. Ministers have learned much, but there is not likely to be much statesmanship in Government policy after independence.

Cohesion of the Country

5. Difficulties in the control of the police and military forces may eventually reduce the cohesion of the country, but these do not seem likely to arise in a serious form in the first few years after independence. The Government may be reluctant to rely for a long period on British officers for the higher officer ranks in the army and police, and precipitate steps of Africanisation would be seriously prejudicial to discipline and efficiency, and be liable to undermine the Central Government's control of the country.

/Limitations...

Limitations to Progress

6. The enervating climate, which saps energy and initiative, and the high prevalence of disease, are likely to impose a strict limit on the capacity of the Gold Coast to make progress.

B. DOMESTIC PROSPECTS IN THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

Decay of Administration

7. The central problem of the transition is how to prevent administrative failure in the few years after independence. Political advance having run far ahead of Africanisation of the services, the requisite degree of efficiency and integrity cannot be supplied by Africans, so far as can be seen ahead. The prospects of enough efficient British officers staying on for more than another two or three years seem to be very poor. The main African Ministers have an inadequate idea of the extent to which they are dependent on British officers and are liable to pursue policies that will discourage men from staying. Employment of overseas officers on short-term contracts seems unlikely to fill the gap, though it will slow up the pace of run-down. There is, therefore, a serious risk of progressive administrative decline.

Economic Prospect

8. So long as order is maintained, the effects of weak government need not be disastrous on account of the buoyancy of primary production. The basic economy of the country should remain sound, with continuation of production of foodstuffs and export of cocoa, gold and diamonds at present levels: and the Volta River Project would result in a great addition to resources.

Form of Government

9. While the forms of parliamentary democracy are likely to be preserved, the country is too immature for the Government to be responsible to the electorate in any real sense. The C.P.P. seems likely to rely mainly on Tammany methods and the strong arm, and the present Opposition on appeals to tradition and to tribal and regional sentiment.

Characteristics of Political Leaders

10. The leadership in Government is not likely to be of high quality. The C.P.P. leaders have nationalistic fervour, and a certain amount of determination. They have a sense of humour, which redeems their vanity, and personally they are likeable and respond to a friendly approach. But their political ideas and methods are crude; and they lack a sense of realities. Their knowledge is shallow; and they are mercurial and wanting in solidity of character and integrity. The opposition includes among its main figures some men who are more balanced and better informed, and who have greater integrity, but they are relatively ineffective.

Timing of Independence

11. Delay of independence would bring great advantages in the field of future domestic administration. But unless delay was clearly the result of internal factors, postponement would have great dangers for future external relations, and these dangers outweigh domestic administrative considerations.

/Party...

Party Political Prospects

12. A change of Government before independence at present seems to be unlikely. A non-C.P.P. Government would probably be better informed and have a more responsible approach to external relations; but it would not necessarily handle administration any better than the C.P.P.; and it remains to be seen whether the opponents of the C.P.P. could ever muster and retain enough solidarity to work together as a Government.

C. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Commonwealth Membership

13. Commonwealth relations are so elastic that the Gold Coast ought to be able to be fitted fairly smoothly within the Commonwealth framework, unless administration breaks down: and the Gold Coast would be likely to derive substantial benefits from the Commonwealth connection. But she will constitute a new class of member on account of her inability to administer her affairs competently without heavy dependence on overseas officers.

Sentiment towards the Commonwealth

14. To the main C.P.P. Ministers the Commonwealth is a bodiless abstraction devoid of sentimental appeal. If it could be given concrete meaning before independence, the effect on Gold Coast policy after independence would probably be far-reaching. The only really effective means would be Gold Coast attendance at Commonwealth meetings.

United Kingdom Relations with the Gold Coast

15. Conduct of United Kingdom relations during the first few years of independence will not be easy on account of the immaturity of C.P.P. Ministers. But if administration remains on an even keel, and if we are patient, our relations with the Gold Coast ought to be reasonably good. Relations with a Government drawn from the present Opposition might be easier.

United Kingdom Assistance

16. If the United Kingdom Government contributes capital to the Volta River Project according to present plans, there seems to be no reason to expect requests for financial assistance in other major forms.

Anti-Colonialism and Neutralism

17. The Nkrumah Government, if in power after independence, will be inclined to assert its independence of British apron-strings in various ways, some of which may be embarrassing. It seems likely to indulge in active steps of anti-colonialism in West Africa and perhaps further afield, and with Indian guidance these might be prejudicial to healthy political progress in other dependencies. On the broader international issues, India will have a magnetic attraction for the C.P.P. But the Gold Coast will presumably be overshadowed in West Africa by Nigeria when the latter attains independence and her policies influenced by Nigerian policies. To the extent, therefore, that Nigerian policy is different, the Gold Coast attitude may be adapted.

/Commercial...

Commercial Policy

18. In commercial policy there is likely for a time to be some encouragement of domestic enterprise at the expense of overseas interests and some prejudice in favour of foreign countries at our expense. But if we are patient and accommodating, our strong position ought not to be seriously undermined.

Defence Co-operation

19. In seeking from a C.P.P. Government any positive contribution in Commonwealth defence we should be swimming against the neutralist stream. But the Gold Coast Government seems likely to be prepared to co-operate over defence facilities if carefully handled.

D. GENERAL CONCLUSION

20. The Gold Coast is likely to settle down eventually at a comparatively low level of efficiency. The conditions for reasonable commercial relations with the U.K. seem likely to be satisfied. The first ten years after independence will be of disproportionate importance for the future and there is a serious danger that during this period the country will lose overseas personnel to an extent that may undermine the administration beyond repair.

(F. E. Cumming-Bruce)

19th August, 1955