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**UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND THE DILEMMA OF INDEPENDENCE:  
NORTHERN GHANA IN NATIONALIST POLITICS, 1946-1956**

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**Introduction**

Until 1946, Northern Ghana was isolated politically from the rest of the country. Its people were neither represented in the Legislative or in the Executive Council. The Burns Constitution advanced the course of integrating Northern Ghana into the rest of the country when in 1946 it made the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories a member of the Legislative Council. In 1951, representatives of Northern Ghana for the first time took seats in the expanded Legislative Assembly. But they found the immediate self-government demand of the southern members distasteful. Northerners advocated a slower approach of self-government to enable their region, which had lacked behind in socio-economic development to catch up with the rest.

This paper attempts to examine how Northern Ghana was isolated from the politics of the country, attempts made to re-integrate it into the rest of the country, and the dilemma the North faced as independence approached.

**British Colonial Policy in the Northern Territories**

Britain acquired the Northern Ghana through treaties it signed with some chiefs during the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The period preceding the advent of the British rule had witnessed a dislocation and exhaustion of both human and natural resources of the North by the depredation of slave raiders, notably Samory and Babatu. Life was therefore uncertain, the people were suspicious of all strangers, and the depressed conditions discouraged both trade and agriculture. Consequently, the most pressing consideration of the British was the adoption of simple measures to restore peace and confidence.

With an area almost forty thousand square miles and with a skeletal staff, Lt.-Col. Northcott, the first Commissioner and Commandant realized the expediency of supporting and creating chiefs as an aid to the administration. This policy attained its highest expression between 1905 and 1912 when paramount chiefs were appointed to innumerable entities designed as "native states"<sup>1</sup>. After consolidating their rule the British began to take steps to isolate the North from the Gold Coast Colony and Asante. The Order in Council, which established the Protectorate, provided for an administration formally distinct from those of Asante and the Gold Coast Colony. Northcott suggested that an annual tax should be collected from the area "before the pernicious doctrine of individual irresponsibility filters

through from the coast"<sup>2</sup>. He again advocated the introduction of a separate coinage in the Dependency. Although Northcott's untimely death prevented him from implementing his scheme, his successors did. According to Kimble, until the late 1940s the chief characteristic of British policy was "a deliberate attempt to isolate the Northern Territories from the twentieth century"<sup>3</sup>.

The British wanted to preserve the North from what they regarded as disruptive outside influence. This was manifested mostly in the fostering of traditional values and institutions, which were epitomised in indirect rule. Indirect Rule, it was claimed, would permit the gradual acquisition of skills necessary for the traditional rulers to exercise greater degrees of political authority, while remaining firmly rooted in traditional political institutions and practices. Another isolationist policy was the approach to missions and European education. While Christian missions were given unfettered opportunities to start schools, and while the government itself opened many schools in the Colony and Asante, education was to be rigidly controlled in the North. Apart from the White Fathers and the Wesleyan Missions, no others were allowed to operate in the Northern Protectorate. It was alleged that the control of education would avoid the breakdown of traditional authority, which had taken place in Asante and the Colony because of the "misdirected" educational expansion<sup>4</sup>. In the North much stress was placed on the fostering of "respect for native rulers and institutions" to avoid "denationalization" and the creation of "a half-baked European<sup>5</sup>." The exclusion of missionaries from the North with the exception of the White Fathers greatly contributed to the slow development of the area, in the social and educational fields. One of the main effects of this was that Northern Ghana became the labour pool for the country.

But it was in participation in national politics that the isolation was most prominent. Southerners had been appointed to the Legislative Council since 1850 but it was only in 1951 that Northerners were represented in the Legislature. Although some progress was made to involve the people in government at the local level since the 1930s, no steps were taken to proceed further with political development. Nor were attempts made to integrate the Dependency with Asante and the Colony. The official view remained that political consciousness had not yet reached a point where "public opinion" had emerged, as suggested by Lord Hailey's observation in 1944 that "in the Northern Territories no demand for participation in the Legislative Council so far has appeared<sup>6</sup>." In fact, one wonders how such a desire could have emerged considering the "wall" that had been built between the North and the South. Even after the Second World War, the administration still felt that the time was not yet ripe for any greater degree of formal integration between the two areas; in any event there was no formal mechanism by which representatives of the North could be selected to participate in the Legislative Council. The only move towards the integration of the North with the rest of the Gold Coast was the appointment of the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories to the executive Council in 1934. But this was more apparent than real since he could not take part in the Council's debates because of his duties. The North was still firmly in the grips of administrators with a strong belief in indirect rule both as a method of administration and as an instrument to further the political development of the region, and in the necessity of isolating the North from "untoward influence" especially

from the south. Until 1951, the north remained according to Apter, "the step-child of central Gold Coast politics?" In spite of this an elite emerged to lead the North, albeit, reluctantly to integrate it into the rest of the country.

### **Northern Educated Elite and Nationalist Politics**

A Northern elite emerged only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>, mainly because of the limited educational opportunities available and the determination of colonial officials to isolate the North from what they regarded as the Southern 'virus'<sup>9</sup>. But the unintended actions of the colonial administration also led to the emergence of a northern elite because of the introduction of a Western type of education.

The emergence of a northern elite had a humble beginning. In 1914, the first batch of Northerners entered the Accra Training College. Before they completed their course, they informed the Chief Commissioner that:

*We will try our best with your help to get ourselves experienced and properly trained to become good qualified teachers. We will honour and obey our masters in order that they may impart to us what they have in them. And we beg to promise faithfully to continue working hard after our course, to become a credit to our country, and to do the good that we can, to satisfy you and the Director of Education.<sup>10</sup>*

This group helped to chart a role – that of the elite – which subsequent northern teachers were to play in the political and social life of the region. It was the opening of the Achimota College in 1927 that saw an increase in the number of Northerners trained as teachers. These Northern Achimota trained teachers began to criticize the system of education and administration existing in the Dependency. By the late 1930s, officials in the North began to raise objections about the training of Northerners at Achimota because they noted signs of discontent among them. The chief complaints were that they adopted an independent attitude and outlook when they returned home.<sup>11</sup>

Yakubu Tali, one of the Achimota trained teachers, was reported to have been critical of the British administration in the North. He made it clear that he was out of sympathy with indirect rule. Yakubu also criticized the educational system, which he thought was not sufficiently progressive. Politically, Yakubu Tali was regarded as a disturbing and disruptive element. W.H. Jones, Chief Commissioner, wrote that Yakubu did not only condemn the native Administration but showed his contempt for Native Authorities by wearing sandals of a pattern which were reserved for chiefs.<sup>12</sup>

The dissatisfaction of the Northern élite, mostly teachers, about the backwardness of the Protectorate led them to form an association in Tamale in 1936 to promote Northern interests. The association was small and isolated and it made no efforts to contact the chiefs to

form a united front.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the colonial administration felt the establishment of the association represented a threat. They feared that its demand for more schools could lead to more explicitly political interests, possibly along the lines of the Aborigines' Right Protection Society. E.N. Jones, the Chief Commissioner and the Senior Provincial Inspectors of Schools moved against the association, firstly by warnings and intimidation, then by penalties and transfers of the teachers involved. The association was soon disbanded since all members were civil servants. Although the association did not gain anything, it is possible that the opening of four schools in the Protectorate between 1936 and 1938 was the result of its activities.

### **Formation of Northern Territorial Council**

As the Second World War drew to a close the colonial authorities saw the desirability of integrating Northern Ghana into national politics. They thought of establishing a consultative body in the Dependency, partly to provide unofficial representatives for an expanded legislature, which would include the North. This was in line with Lord Hailey's recommendations that steps be taken to establish such bodies for the Northern Territories and Asante. He saw the creation of such bodies as a necessary step towards the establishment of a central legislature for all the three administrative units.<sup>14</sup>

In 1946, the colonial administration created the Northern Territories Territorial Council at least partly, with the aim of providing a vehicle for the advancement of educated chiefs and commoners.<sup>15</sup> The N.T.C. was a non-statutory body and its role was mainly consultative. It had limited powers and indeed, for the first four years of its existence, the N.T.C. existed simply at the invitation of the Chief Commissioner of the Protectorate. In line with Lord Hailey's recommendations, its functions were to discuss matters of common interest to the Native Authorities and to make recommendations to the Chief Commissioner.<sup>16</sup>

Members of the N.T.C. were to be selected by the Native Authorities but in principle, it consisted of the heads of the Native Authorities, with an additional member for Western Dagbon. Initially therefore, the N.T.C. was a "chiefs" Council which was in line with the long-held British view that if political power in West Africa was to devolve at all, it should devolve to the "natural rulers of the people", who were the chiefs. It was therefore hoped that through the N.T.C. the chiefs were to be trained "first to advance beyond local affairs to matters that affect all and then to play a role in the Colony-wide affairs."<sup>17</sup> The N.T.C. was regarded by the British as a training school where future representatives of the central legislature would learn the art of debates, rules of procedure and other traditions associated with the Westminster form of government.

However, within five years of the establishment of the N.T.C., chiefs gave way to non-chiefs without a struggle. The chiefs realized that they could not cope with a legislature, elections and political parties, which could not be handled within the framework of traditional institutions and practices. Perhaps, the illiterate chiefs gave way to the educated with virtually no struggle because they saw no fundamental conflict of interest between

themselves and their educated advisors, who were often their sons. Soon after its formation, the N.T.C. began to discuss matters relating to local administration, development and social problems of the region. Beginning from the third session the Council members requested more development for the North on the grounds that the area should have everything the South had. One such problem was the extension of the railhead from Kumasi to Navrongo.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1949, the Gold Coast Legislative Council asked the N.T.C. to advise it on the Coussey Committee's report on local government as it affected the Dependency. The Chief Commissioner selected a six member Committee, five of whom were chiefs to deliberate on the request.<sup>19</sup> After consulting principally "head-chiefs and their Councillor", it found out that they advocated "a slower approach to local government reforms than had been recommended by the Coussey Committee."<sup>20</sup> The reasons the Committee advanced to justify its recommendations for a "slower" approach to reforms were: the lack of political consciousness among people of the Protectorate, paucity of educational facilities in the area which accounted for the lack of an educated class and their reliance and satisfaction with chieftaincy as the pivot of Northern administration which the reforms wanted to undermine.<sup>21</sup>

This outlook, it should be remarked, was a reflection of the policy of isolation, which had characterized British policy in the region for more than fifty years. The Committee's recommendations greatly overestimated the respect and positions of chiefs in the region while underestimating the pace of change in the South. It also deliberately ignored the existence of a small class of Northerners who were prepared to follow Kwame Nkrumah and who according to Ladouceur could be described as "a small faction with a dynamic political creed."<sup>22</sup> The N.T.C. accepted the Committee's report without discussion although when it came to a vote on it five members voted against it. This was an early indication of how politics of the region was going to be.

An issue which concerned both the N.T.C. and the C.P.P. government was the question of whether the Northern section of the British Mandated Togoland was to be amalgamated to the rest of the Gold Coast or allowed to join the French Mandated Togoland to form one country.<sup>23</sup> Both the N.T.C. and the Nkrumah regime were agreed that they should be amalgamated to the Gold Coast since three paramount chiefs in the Protectorate were opposed to having their areas dismembered.

### **Northern Politicians, Nationalist Politics and Decolonisation**

Developments in the country were to draw the N.T.C. into the national political orbit. Following the setting up of the Coussey Committee to study and make recommendations on the report of the Watson Committee, the Chief Commissioner was requested to select five people to serve on the Coussey Committee. The inclusion of the N.T.C. on the Coussey Committee symbolized the formal ending of the policy of isolating the North from events in the South. Henceforth, the North would be included in any new legislature. Representa-

tive from the region therefore participated in the drawing of the new constitution.<sup>24</sup> The Northerners on the Committee were apprehensive about the pro-self-government orientation of the other members of the Committee but they managed to get some concessions for the North. These concessions were connected with chieftaincy and the rapid development of the area.<sup>25</sup> Also, with regard to the North, the Coussey Committee recommended that the N.T.C. should be the Regional Council except that ten new members were to be elected to join the N.T.C. The Northern Territories were not represented on the Ewart Committee appointed by the Legislative Council to translate the franchise recommendations of the Coussey Committee. But the Ewart Committee recommended that the North should be allocated 19 seats to be elected by an Electoral College based on the N.T.C. and the Native Authorities. However, the North was invited to serve on the Legislative Council that accepted the recommendations of the Ewart Committee. The participation was the second occasion in which Northerners were formally represented at deliberations affecting the whole country.

Although Northerners had no voice in the decision to integrate their region with the Colony and Asante, they used every opportunity to make known their views on the conditions under which the integration was to be carried out. They now realized the great gulf separating them from the rest of the country and what this meant for the future. For example, when Nkrumah called the "Ghana People's Representative Assembly" in November 1949 in response to the Coussey Report, the N.T.C. rejected the resolution of the Assembly which called for immediate self-government and full dominion within the Commonwealth. It argued that the Northern Territories would not be ripe for self-government for ten to fifteen years.<sup>26</sup> The view of Northerners which was articulated by the N.T.C. was that independence should be delayed until such time as the region was on a footing of equality socially and economically with the South. Northerners did not oppose independence *per se* but its timing. They felt justified in making these requests because as far as they were concerned, their status was different from the Colony and Asante. Northerners were "protected persons" whose relationship with Britain was defined by treaties signed by their chiefs. To them, as far as they were aware, these treaties had not been abrogated or denounced by either party which meant that the British Government had certain responsibilities towards the chiefs and people of the area. The same reasoning of unpreparedness of the Protectorate is reflected in the parable Ya Na Mahama III told Nkrumah:

*If three women who were pregnant, one at nine months, one at seven months and the other at three months were to give birth, the woman at nine months would give birth to a child, and also the woman at seven months. But the woman three months would deliver only blood and tissue. So the Colony and Asante could go ahead with independence but the North was not yet ready.<sup>27</sup>*

Northerners therefore feared that they would forever remain subservient both economically and politically to Southerners but they did not want their area, according to J.A.

Braimah, to "remain nothing more than labour camp."<sup>28</sup>

In October 1952, Nkrumah invited the territorial councils, political parties and groups to submit written proposals on various aspects of constitutional reforms. At its discussions, the N.T.C. suggested that the leader of the majority should assume the title of Prime Minister and that there should be direct elections in the Northern Territories. It however, wanted little change in the 1950 Constitution in which there were three ex-officio members and the Governor was to have reserved powers. The N.T.C. also suggested that a second chamber should be created and northern representation in the cabinet should be increased.<sup>29</sup> The Council asked its Standing Committee to prepare a memorandum on the basis of its discussions to be submitted to the government.

The draft memorandum was discussed by the N.T.C. It cautioned against "undue haste towards self-government" and suggested that "political change should be based on economic advance." The memorandum called for the retention of the three ex-officio ministers, the establishment of a Second Chamber or Senate, the guarantee of a one quarter of the cabinet posts for the North, resolution of the Togoland issue before independence, safeguards for the protection of chieftaincy and the retention of the Governor's reserved powers.<sup>30</sup> However, only the last two suggestions were incorporated in the Government's Proposals for Constitutional Reform published in July 1953. In May 1953, Nkrumah and the Governor met the Standing Committee of the N.T.C. and traditional rulers of the North in Tamale to discuss constitutional reform and progress for independence. Northerners expressed their hesitation and fears explaining that while they did not oppose the granting of independence, they wanted their area to be developed first. They further raised two more issues in addition to those contained in their memorandum; they wanted a Minister of State appointed for the North and the right of the Northern Territories to secede if they were dissatisfied with the new constitution.<sup>31</sup> Although the two matters were not discussed, it was a clear indication of the gravity with which Northerners viewed early independence.

The North received assurance from Nkrumah that his government will not allow the region to be divided by an international boundary as a result of the Togoland question. He also assured them that defence and external affairs would be the responsibility of Britain. Others were that the North would be represented in the Assembly in proportion to its population and would also have "adequate representation" in the cabinet. Finally, Nkrumah promised Northern leadership that a "special development organization" would be established to look after its development.<sup>32</sup> Northern leadership agreed to support further constitutional progress and gave way on the proposal for a second chamber and the retention of ex-officio ministers in view of the above promises.

### **Underdevelopment, Northern Concerns, and the Post-Independence Agenda**

As the country rapidly approached self-government, the N.T.C. was concerned about the slow rate of development in the North. We have already noted that the memorandum of July 1953 called for economic development before constitutional advance. In line with this

objective, the N.T.C. appointed a Development Committee in September 1953 to "advise the government on general development projects in the Northern Territories and in the matter of allocation of funds for these developments." The resolution also called on the government to provide:

*A special grant to facilitate rapid development in the Northern Territories during the transitional period which the Gold Coast will pass before attaining Dominion status.<sup>33</sup>*

This was mainly because the northern leadership remained skeptical in spite of the government's promises. In 1951, Northerners had entered the Legislative Assembly with great expectations for the development of their region. But they were disappointed. For example, only 7.3 per cent of the funds earmarked for educational development in the country were allocated to the North.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes, the hesitant attitude of Northerners was irritating to other members of the Assembly. This compelled Danquah, most often a sympathizer of the Northern causes to retort one day:

*We'll look, gentlemen of the North, we are prepared to wait for you, but how long do you want us to wait?...we are suggesting to you, go back quietly and think of the great responsibility you have placed on your shoulders, that is, you are holding up self-government.<sup>35</sup>*

The Northern elite believed that the British government would ultimately hand them over unprepared to an unsympathetic independent African government controlled by Southerners. These Southerners, the Northerners felt would not consent to develop the North; instead they would leave the North as a "labour camp" and undermine northern traditions especially chieftaincy.

The dissatisfaction of the Northern members of the Legislative Assembly reached its peak when J.A. Braimah, resigned over a bribery case and the failure of the government to extend the railway to the North.<sup>36</sup> Braimah's resignation came as a great surprise to many Northerners who felt he had been so misled by the wickedness of Southern politics that he had allowed himself to be corrupted by a foreign contractor. The decision of the CPP to field candidates in the North for the impending 1954 elections was seen as a challenge to Northern leadership.<sup>37</sup> The Braimah affair, the CPP challenge and the mistrust many Northerners had for that party encouraged them to form the Northern People's Party<sup>38</sup> in April 1954 to contest the elections. The aims and objectives of the NPP reflected the desire of the North to be at par with the south in terms of social, economic and educational development.<sup>39</sup>

One thing becomes clear about the formation of the NPP, it was the provision of a common forum, that is the Legislative Assembly, which enabled representatives of the North to come together to seek solutions to their common problems. The NPP did not seek to secede from the rest of the country nor did it put obstacles on the march to independence. Rather, what dawned on the northern elites was the reality of the socio-economic neglect of their area. This realization was strengthened and reinforced by the superior and condescending attitude invariably shown by "Southerners" posted as clerks or teachers to their region. For example, Yakubu Tali asked in the Legislative Assembly why people from the South working in the North wanted an extra remuneration of 30s a month when Europeans had not asked for such a privilege.<sup>40</sup> All these helped to produce a strong-held belief that the North was not only different from the South, but that it was in danger of being subjected to hasty and radical Southern politicians. Although formed only two months before the 1954 elections the NPP won twelve of the twenty-six seats allocated for the North. This was a clear indication that the message of the northern elite was well received by the people.

When the Legislative Assembly convened in late July 1954, the Northerners found themselves to be the largest in opposition. The Ghana Congress and the Moslem Association Party, its main allies won few seats. The NPP found itself in an unexpected and awkward situation for it had been formed to seek acceleration of development for the North and had hoped to play a neutral role between the government and the opposition but it now found itself as the leading opposition party. Through the Chief Regional Officer<sup>41</sup>, the Governor advised the NPP leadership not to enter the Assembly as an opposition but play a neutral role by considering all issues objectively and not to oppose the government unnecessarily since Nkrumah was not likely to do much for the North. In line with the Westminster parliamentary system, the leader of NPP was to be the leader of the Opposition. Nkrumah refused to recognize "members of the opposite side of the House as being an opposition in the true sense" since there was "no group among them which could form an alternative government."<sup>42</sup> He also made it clear that the government did not consider it desirable to recognize as official opposition a party organized along regional lines but was prepared to recognize them as "unofficial opposition - an unofficial body of critics of government."<sup>43</sup> He was however prevailed upon by the Governor to recognize the leader of NPP as Leader of the Opposition but warned:

*If we tolerate the formation of political parties on regional, sectional or religious bases, we shall not only be heading for political chaos but, worse still, we shall be sowing the destruction of our national existence. Coming events cast their shadows before them, and the Government shall consider what steps should be taken to eradicate this emerging evil in our national life.<sup>44</sup>*

However, the assumption by the NPP, as the official opposition, which again formalized the differences between the North and the South, also bode well for the nation because Northerners agreed to work within the national framework that was represented in the

Legislative Assembly. From then onwards, members of the NPP no longer saw themselves standing aloof from party politics and playing the neutral role they had originally fashioned for themselves. They now saw the Dependency as an integral part of the political process and perhaps this explains why they rejected the Governor's advice to play a neutral role in the Legislative Assembly. The NPP and indeed, all Northerners in the Assembly were now "settling in" in national politics and there were talks of changing the name of the party to National People's Party when new developments changed the national political scene. This was the formation of the National Liberation Movement.<sup>45</sup>

### **NPP and NLM**

Dissatisfaction among Asantes and ex-CPP supporters over the price of cocoa led to the formation of the N.L.M. The formation of the N.L.M. was greeted with relief by the NPP and an alliance was arranged between the two parties. Basically, the N.L.M. stood for a federal constitution for the Gold Coast as the only guarantee to prevent what it regarded as the creeping dictatorship of Nkrumah. Federation, it believed, would allow each region to conduct its own affairs with minimum interference from the central government. Much as the NPP agreed with the N.L.M. on the need to safeguard local interests, it feared that in a federal system that was truly decentralized, the North would be worse off since it did not have enough resources to sustain a regional administration let alone a development programme.<sup>46</sup>

Northern leadership began to see the government as basically hostile to northern interests. This coincided with the rise of the question of regional devolution of power. Northerners had agreed to support the CPP, as we have seen, because of its promise to set up regional councils as recommended by the Coussey Committee. With Asante calling for federation through the N.L.M., Northerners felt more confident in pressing their demand for regional autonomy, taking care to point out that the North was "not singing the same song as Ashanti" but warned that unless government considered granting a substantial degree of regional autonomy in the near future, "we will continue singing and in the end sing federation."<sup>47</sup>

Although the leadership of the NPP agreed to an alliance with the N.L.M. they still wanted to maintain an independent identity because of difficulties the North would encounter in a fully federal state. The NPP however obtained some concessions from the N.L.M. In the Proposals for a Federal Constitution for an Independent Gold Coast and Togoland published on behalf of the NPP, N.L.M. and other political associations opposed to the CPP, it was stated that revenue was to be divided between the centre and regions on the basis of derivation. The document further said:

*In applying, for example, the principles of derivation and population in the division of revenue for cocoa only, the Colony shall be entitled to thirty five per cent, Ashanti and the Northern Territories twenty seven and a half percent each, and Togoland ten per cent.*<sup>48</sup>

There was an impasse between the CPP and the N.L.M. about constitutional advance. In the face of this, the British government decided to call an election to see which of them had the support of the majority in the country.<sup>49</sup> The NPP was now firmly allied with the N.L.M. and other political parties in an anti-CPP coalition. The NPP leadership believed that the alliance would win the election and be called upon to form a government, and they were prepared to take part in such a government. The NPP agreed that Busia, not Dombo, should lead the alliance with Dombo as his deputy. The alliance with the N.L.M. meant that the NPP made a number of concessions. For instance, they were now prepared to accept that independence would come in the near future and there was little they could do to prevent it. The leadership felt that the North would be given more funds for development under N.L.M. than the CPP. The NPP won fifteen of the twenty-six seats contested in the North. However, like the 1954 elections, the CPP won 71 of the 104 seats contested countrywide. Although the NPP was the strongest party in the North, in real terms the elections represented a defeat for it since the CPP increased its strength in the region and besides, it lost the post of Leader of Opposition. It can, therefore, be said that the elections did not solve any of the Northerners' problems but only confirmed their predicament as independence drew nearer.

### **Northern Hopes and Northern fears on the Eve of Independence**

However, there had been disagreements all along among northern leadership. The disagreement was mainly between CPP and NPP supporters within both the N.T.C. and Legislative Assembly. For example, when the NPP members of the Council presented a motion which referred to the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly for the creation of a federal system of government and a Second Chamber for the Gold Coast, the CPP members countered with an amendment to the effect that the N.T.C. should declare itself against a federal system of government.<sup>50</sup> Conflicts within the Northern leadership reached its apogee to and immediately after the Achimota Conference convened to study the report of Sir Frederick Bourne, appointed to study the devolution of power in the Gold Coast.<sup>51</sup> In the face of opposition from the CPP members the N.T.C. decided not to send a delegation until the status of the Protectorate had been clarified by the Governor at a durbar in Tamale scheduled for April 1956.<sup>52</sup>

At the durbar which was held in May 1956, Governor Sir Charles Noble Arden-Clarke told the chiefs and people that the powers of the crown did not differ from those it possessed from the rest of the Gold Coast. He further told them that the Dependency had played a full part in the creation and operation of the 1954 constitution and that the British government no more regarded the treaties which had been signed with Northern chiefs as significant. Finally, the Governor informed them that it was the wish of the crown that the Protectorate should form an integral part of an independent Gold Coast. Immediately after the meeting, the N.T.C. decided to send a delegation with two others from Asante and the Togoland Congress to London to plead its cause. The main objective of the Northern delegation was to secure concessions for the North in the event of independence and to press for accelerated development in the form of a grant from the British government. The meeting of the

delegation with John Hare, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs on 10th September, 1956, did not produce any result: neither was that of a day later with A.T. Lennox-Boyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Rather, in a dispatch to the governor of the Gold Coast made public, the Secretary of State for the Colonies announced that the date for independence for the Gold Coast would be 6 March 1957.

The Northern leadership began to panic. It believed that independence would be granted to the Gold Coast with no concessions or guarantees made at all to the North. At a meeting of the N.T.C. in September 1956, a resolution was passed calling on the British government to make outright grant of money for the development of the North and bring it to parity with the South in a self-governing Gold Coast.<sup>53</sup> A month later, the Council approved, this time, with the support of the CPP members of the Council, a seven point memorandum.<sup>54</sup> Equipped with the memorandum, an N.T.C. delegation attended a Constitutional Conference called by the government between 30th October and 2nd November, 1956. As would be expected, the conference did not produce an over-all agreement because, while the opposition called for a federation, the government wanted a unitary state. The government therefore rejected all the demands of the opposition including those by the N.T.C.

In the face of the impasse between the government and opposition, Lennox-Boyd paid a visit to the Gold Coast. He met northern leaders in Tamale at which they expressed their apprehensions about an independent Ghana. But when they were called upon to declare their opposition to independence, they could not. The Secretary of State for Colonies then told them there was nothing he could do to delay independence. He again told the Northern leaders that, independence would mean a de facto abrogation of the treaties since the British Government could not maintain a Special relation with a part of an independent country. Realizing that it had the support of the majority of the people of the Gold Coast, and in order not to delay independence unduly, the government made a few concessions. The most important of these was that two-thirds of the members of the Regional Assembly should give their consent before the constitution could be amended. The government had won the day and northern opposition, which was epitomized in the N.T.C. and NPP, capitulated. On 6 March 1957, the British flag was lowered in Tamale and that of the newly independent Ghana was hoisted.

## **Conclusion**

Two things stand out clearly with regards to the politics in Northern Ghana between 1946 and 1956. The first is that the Northerners became more convinced of the relative socio-economic backwardness of the region and the need to bring it into parity with the South before independence. Second, it is clear that as time went on, the elite of the North realized that they had little bargaining power and even smaller incentive to capitalize on their contingent and rather tenuous identity. They thus began to trade cooperation for concessions. Economic and social deprivation is therefore the key factor in understanding the politics of Northern Ghana between 1946 and 1956.

## Reference and Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> In 1912, the Nayiri and the Wa Na were declared paramount chiefs for the North East and North West Provinces respectively. See Executive Order by C.H. Armitage, 14 April 1912. ADM. 56/1/252; National Archives of Ghana (hereafter NAG), Accra.

<sup>2</sup> Kimble, D. *A Political History of Ghana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 554.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of British educational policy in the Northern Territories see Bening, R.B., *A History of Education in Northern Ghana, 1907 – 1976* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1990)

<sup>5</sup> Memo., F.G. Guggisberg, 9 May, 1925 to Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories (hereafter C.C.N.T.), ADM. 56/1/298; NAG, Accra.

<sup>6</sup> Lord Hailey, W., *Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa* (London: 1971 [1944], p. 138

<sup>7</sup> Apter, D.E., *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Elite as used in this article stands for those who received any formal education and who fought to enable the North have socio-economic parity with the rest of the country.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Northern students attending the Achimota College were not allowed to circulate in Accra when school closed. They were put on the next available train to Kumasi and then to Tamale. Also, from the 1940s any of the northern extraction who once taught in the Colony and Asante were looked at with suspicion. The administration refused to employ one Gabriel Amoro as a teacher because he had taught at Abosso "here he was likely to learn little of value and much of evil." See M.F. Wentworth, Notes on a visit to the Sandema Native Administration, 6 & 8 March, 1937, p. 1 ADM. 1/214-217; National Archives of Ghana, Tamale, (hereafter NAGT).

<sup>10</sup> J.B. Harruna, W.A. and D.A. Mahama to C.C.N.T., 31 January 1918, ADM. 56/1/88; NAG, Accra.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes of the Political Conference held at Tamale, 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> April 1936, ADM. 1/533; NAGT.

<sup>12</sup> W.H. Jones, 25 January 1939 to the Principal, Achimota College.

<sup>13</sup> The insignificance of the association is testified to by the fact that J.S. Kaleem and J.A. Braimah, two of its leading members disagreed on its name. See Ladouceur, P.A., Chiefs

and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana (London: Longman, 1979) p. 97, footnote 37.

<sup>14</sup> Lord Hailey, *Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa* with an introduction by Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. (Kraus Reprint, 1979), p. 138. The administrative units were the Colony, Asante Protectorate and the Northern Territories.

<sup>15</sup> The name Northern Territories Territorial Council was changed to Northern Territorial Council (hereafter, NTC). However, when indirect rule was introduced in the Protectorate, the aim of the British as stated by the Governor was to build the system such that "some day Dagombas, Gonjas and Mamprusis should become strong states." See ADM. 1/7; NAGT. If this was the ultimate aim of the British then the creation of the N.T.C. constituted a reversal of policy.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Acting Chief Commissioner, 6 November 1946 to Senior D.C., Mamprusi. ADM. 1/769; NAGT.

<sup>17</sup> N.T.C., First Session, 16 December 1946, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> The railway was not extended to the North because of disagreement among Northerners as to the route it should pass but principally, because the funds for its construction was also needed for the building of the Akosombo Dam.

<sup>19</sup> N.T.C., Sixth Session. 4 – 6 January. 1950. Members of the Committee were Asigiri, Wokandana, J.A. Braimah, Kabachewura; Puobe Imoru, Nandom Na; Abudu Mumuni, Dorimon Na and Yakubu Tali. Tali Na. The only commoner was J.H. Allassani, Secretary to the Dagomba Native Authority.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Committee of the Territorial Council of the Northern Territories appointed to make recommendations concerning Local Government in the Northern Territories, Accra, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ladouceur *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> On the Togoland question see Amenumey, D.E.K., *The Ewe Unification Movement: A Political History* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> The first time an official from the North took part in a national discussion was in 1934 when the Chief Commissioner was made a member of the Executive Council. In that same year the Legislative Council was mandated to legislate for the North. But the first time any voice from a Northern official was heard in the Legislative Council was in 1949 when the Chief Commissioner said "My predecessors in office and I have sat in this Chamber for

nearly four years; but owing to the peculiar constitutional position of the Protectorate, ours has largely been an inarticulate role." E. Norton Jones, *Legislative Council Debates*, 13 December 1949.

<sup>25</sup> See Report of the Committee for Constitutional Reforms, paragraph 248. The report also devoted a section to the need to develop the North to raise the standard of the people to the average of the rest of the country. See Report of the Coussey Committee, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> N.T.C. Sixth Session, 4 – 6 January 1950, pp. 19 and 21.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Ladouceur *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> J.A. Braimah, N.T.C., Sixth session, 4 – 6 January 1950, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> N.T.C., Thirteenth Session, 22 – 23 January 1953. J.A. Braimah was the only Northerner with a Cabinet post.

<sup>30</sup> Gold Coast, The Government's Proposals for Constitutional Reform, Accra, pp. 55 – 60.

<sup>31</sup> West Africa, 22 August 1953, p. 772.

<sup>32</sup> Legislative Debates, 10 July 1953, p. 282 – 285.

<sup>33</sup> N.T.C., Sixteenth Session, 3 – 4 September 1953, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> See Revised Draft Ten Year Plan: The Development Plan, 1951, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> J.B. Danquah, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 1953, Issue 2, p. 489.

<sup>36</sup> For the circumstances which led to the resignation of Braimah, who was one of the leading spokesmen of the North see Austin, D., *Politics in Ghana* (London: 1964), pp. 164 – 5; Nkrumah, K., *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), p. 258; Ladouceur, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 – 111.

<sup>37</sup> The Van Lare Commission on Representational and Electoral Reform recommended that the North should be allocated 26 seats in the new Legislative Assembly of 104. It also recommended the extension of the franchise for the first time to Northerners. See Gold Coast: Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Representational and Electoral Reform, Accra, 1954, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Hereafter NPP.

<sup>39</sup> See The Northern People's Party. *The Constitution*, Accra, 1954.

<sup>40</sup> Yakubu Tali, Legislative Assembly Debates, 2 – 3 – 53. Also, one Adjei, a Southerner who had been transferred to Bolgatanga appealed for transfer back to the South because according to him, the houses in the North were “good for only Northerners and goats.” Mumuni Bawumia, Legislative Assembly Debates, 2 March, 1954.

<sup>41</sup> From 1954 onwards the title Chief Commissioner was changed to Chief Regional Officer while District Commissioners became Government Agents.

<sup>42</sup> Nkrumah *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Legislative Assembly Debates, 11 August 1954.

<sup>45</sup> Hereafter N.L.M. For a detailed account on the N.L.M. See Allman, J., **Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana** (Madison: 1993).

<sup>46</sup> Indeed in a debate about the appointment of lay Magistrates to sit on Local Courts, Northerners argued that the North did not have many educated people to be appointed as Lay Magistrates. Krobo Edusei, Chief Government Whip, pointed out to the Northerners that if they did not have many educated people, how were they going to run a federal system they were clamouring for. See Parliamentary Debates, 11 November 1955.

<sup>47</sup> J.A. Braimah, N.T.C., Twentieth Session, 3 – 4 February 1955.

<sup>48</sup> N.L.M. et al., Proposals for a Federal Constitution for an Independent Gold Coast and Togoland, Kumasi, 1955. The proposals were published in the name of the N.L.M., NPP, the Togoland Congress, the Ghana Congress Party, the Moslem Association Party and the Anlo Youth Association.

<sup>49</sup> The period before the 1956 elections saw some of the worst disturbances between the supporters of the CPP and the N.L.M. in the history of the Gold Coast. Arson and murder characterized it. See Austin *op. cit.*, pp. 267 – 74; Boahen, A.A., **Ghana: evolution and change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries** (London: 1975), pp. 186 – 7.

<sup>50</sup> N.T.C., 21 Session, 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> May 1955. Voting on the amendment was 10 for and 11 against while voting for the main motion was 11 for and 10 against. *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> For the circumstances which led to the appointment of Sir Frederick Bourne as constitutional advisor and his report see Kimble *op. cit.*, pp. 723 – 44; Austin *op. cit.*, 301 – 303.

<sup>52</sup> However, a CPP delegation led by E.A. Mahama attended the Achimota Conference not as members of the N.T.C. but as representatives of their District Councils. See Resolution of the four who attended the Conference in 44 Meeting of the Standing Committee, 13<sup>th</sup> –

17<sup>th</sup> March 1956, pp. 5 – 6. ADM. 65/5/4; NAG, Accra.

<sup>53</sup> N.T.C., 26<sup>th</sup> Session, 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 1956, p. 47.

<sup>54</sup> See Minutes of the 27 Session of NT.C., 19 – 20 October 1956. pp. 24 – 27.