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CABINET

THE GOLD COAST

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

I seek the concurrence of my colleagues to make an early announcement that Her Majesty's Government will now introduce into Parliament a Gold Coast Independence Bill and that—subject to its passage through Parliament—the Gold Coast will be accorded independence within the Commonwealth on 6th March, 1957 or as soon as possible thereafter. I would prefer to call this self-government within the Commonwealth. Wherever possible I am trying to use (and get accepted) the words "self-government" for "independence." But as I have previously explained to my colleagues, it is too late to use these more reassuring words in the case of the Gold Coast.

Recent Developments

2. The Cabinet last discussed the question of Gold Coast independence on 3rd May (C.M. (56) 32nd Conclusions, Minute 8). With their approval I announced in the House of Commons on 11th May that, if a general election was held in the Gold Coast, Her Majesty's Government would be ready to accept a motion calling for independence within the Commonwealth passed by a reasonable majority in a newly elected Legislature and that they would then declare a firm date for independence. The text of my statement is at Annex A.

3. A general election was held on 12th and 17th July. It was observed by six members of Parliament drawn from both sides of the House. They have reported that they were satisfied that the election was conducted fairly and properly and in an orderly manner.

4. As a result, Dr. Nkrumah's party (the Convention Peoples' Party) was returned to power with only a slightly reduced majority. They now hold 72 out of the 104 seats in the new Legislative Assembly and, although there was only a 50 per cent. poll, they won 57 per cent. of the votes cast throughout the territory.

5. Although the C.P.P. is strongest in the "Colony" or coastal area, where Dr. Nkrumah won all 44 seats and about 81 per cent. of the total votes cast, popular support for the C.P.P. was not limited to that area. In other Regions they obtained the following proportions of seats and votes:—

Ashanti—

8 out of 21 seats and 43 per cent. of total votes cast;

Northern Territories—

11 out of 26 seats and 45 per cent. of total votes cast;

Trans-Volta Togoland—

9 out of 13 seats and over 55 per cent. of total votes cast.

6. The new Legislative Assembly was opened on 31st July, and on 3rd August the Government introduced its expected motion calling for independence within the Commonwealth. All the Opposition members boycotted the debate (see paragraph 11 below) and the motion was passed *nem con.* If there

had been a vote, the Opposition could not have mustered more than 32 votes against the Government's 72. I must regard the motion therefore as having been passed by a "reasonable majority."

7. The full text of the motion reads as follows:—

"that this Assembly do authorise the Government of the Gold Coast to request Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, as soon as practicable this year, to procure the enactment by the United Kingdom Parliament of an Act to provide for independence of the Gold Coast as a sovereign and independent State within the Commonwealth under the name of Ghana."

8. The Governor has informed me that despite the wording of the motion the Gold Coast Government will not object if independence should be deferred until the early months of 1957. In fact it has long been understood that 6th March (which is the anniversary of the signing of the Bond of 1844 from which British power and jurisdiction is generally derived) would be particularly acceptable to local opinion.

9. Two main questions arise. The first is the strength of the Opposition and the second concerns corruption in public life in the Gold Coast.

The Opposition

10. The Opposition Parties won considerably less support in the election than they had hoped. They obtained only 31 of the 104 seats in the Assembly and have the support of one independent member. By Regions, the total non-C.P.P. vote in the Colony was 19 per cent., in Ashanti 57 per cent., in Trans-Volta Togoland 45 per cent., and in the Northern Territories 55 per cent. Thus even in Ashanti (the stronghold of the National Liberation Movement, which is the most articulate section of the Opposition), they obtained nothing like overwhelming support.

11. Since the election, the Opposition groups have indicated that they intend to boycott the Legislative Assembly until their demand for a federal constitution has been met. As I informed my colleagues on 3rd May, however, I do not consider it practicable at this stage to operate a federal system in the Gold Coast. Moreover I consider that the Gold Coast Government's published constitutional proposals (which are based on the recommendations of the Constitutional Adviser appointed at my request last year) make reasonable concessions to regional feeling; they provide for a single chamber Legislature at the centre as at present but for the addition of Regional Assemblies with limited powers. The general election was held expressly to resolve the deadlock created by the difference of view between the Government and Opposition Parties, and was fought largely on the constitutional issue. As indicated, the C.P.P. won a large majority over the whole of the country, and my announced undertaking to Dr. Nkrumah (Annex A) did not qualify the expression "reasonable majority" by any reference to the Regions. Disturbing though the Opposition's intransigent attitude is, there are no legitimate grounds on which I could withdraw or postpone carrying out my public undertaking, nor do I think that such a course, even if practicable, would be justified or would promote a settlement.

12. Both the Governor and I have firmly impressed on Dr. Nkrumah (and will continue to do so) the importance of recognising minority rights and of making concessions to opposition opinion. The Governor has recently told me that he still hopes to bring the Parties together to discuss the question of regional devolution. Whether or not this leads to any modification of the Gold Coast Government's present constitutional proposals, it is clearly impossible for us to withhold independence on this account. Dr. Nkrumah's political opponents have the parliamentary and intellectual strength to form an effective parliamentary Opposition if they would only face their responsibilities in the proper constitutional way. I shall see that a delegation which they are sending to London are urged to follow that course. It must be hoped (though I'm afraid without much confidence) that responsibility and experience will gradually bring about an atmosphere of greater political toleration in the country.

13. It is not expected that the political conflict within the Gold Coast will seriously affect public security there before independence. If it did, it should not be beyond the power of the local forces of law and order to control the trouble.

Corruption

14. I have been seriously concerned about corruption in public life in the Gold Coast (one of the issues upon which the Opposition there have fastened). The Report of a recent Commission of Enquiry into the activities of the Cocoa Purchasing Company clearly establishes that the Company was used by the Government for Party purposes and that the Prime Minister and Finance Minister were both implicated by having condoned and connived at irregularities. Much of the money in the hands of the Cocoa Purchasing Company comes from cocoa growers in Ashanti. Their indignation at the use of their cash to help finance their political opponents is, to put it mildly, understandable. As my colleagues know, I have recently had to insist on an enquiry in Nigeria into the relations between the Premier of the Eastern Region and the Continental Bank, and the conference to discuss the next constitutional steps in Nigeria has been postponed pending the enquiry; though there is the important difference that in the Gold Coast case there is no suggestion of Ministers being *personally* corrupt. At my request the Governor has taken up with Dr. Nkrumah the serious situation created by the Cocoa Commission Report. As I have said to the Governor, I am obliged to bear in mind the impact which the Report will make on public opinion here and in other parts of the Commonwealth and the consequent need for it to be demonstrable beyond reasonable doubt that the Gold Coast Government understands the seriousness of the Commission's findings and is determined to remedy the abuses which have been disclosed. I am glad to say that Dr. Nkrumah has now (on 22nd August) made a statement in the Legislative Assembly to the effect that the Report will be published very shortly with a statement of the Government's proposals in respect of its recommendations. He has promised the Assembly a full opportunity to discuss the Report and the Government's proposals. I understand from the Governor that the Report is expected to be published by 31st August, and that Dr. Nkrumah proposes to carry out most of its recommendations. I do not think we could look for more. I do not consider that the Report gives us grounds for going back on the undertaking I gave on 11th May, or should deter us from going ahead with the announcement of independence. I propose therefore that the announcement should be made at some time after the Cocoa Purchasing Commission Report is published but before 15th September, beyond which date the Governor advises me that it would be difficult to hold the position.

The Protectorate

15. The Northern Territories, unlike the rest of the Gold Coast, are a Protectorate, where we have Treaties with the Chiefs dating from the later years of the 19th century. During the last few years the Chiefs have, from time to time, argued that the existence of these Treaties could, and should, operate as a means of staying the grant of independence to the Gold Coast as a whole until such time as the successors to the signatories of those Treaties agreed to their abrogation. At a meeting with the Chiefs in May 1956 the Governor, with the authority of Her Majesty's Government, explained that Her Majesty's Government could not reasonably be expected to regard it as consistent with their policy of constitutional development to allow the Treaties to prevent or delay the attainment by the Gold Coast of full self-government; he pointed out that the North was already taking part in the political institutions of the country as a whole; and of course it has since participated in the general election. The Governor formed the impression from his meeting with the Chiefs that they had accepted the fact that they could not retain their protectorate status, though there is no doubt they are still not unnaturally suspicious of an independent African government.

Togoland

16. In May a plebiscite was held under United Nations auspices in the Trust Territory of British Togoland, the choice being between the following questions:—

- (1) Do you want the integration of Togoland under British administration with an independent Gold Coast?
- (2) Do you want the separation of Togoland under British administration from the Gold Coast and its continuation under trusteeship pending the ultimate determination of its political future?

The proportion of registered voters who participated was 82 per cent.; 58 per cent. of the votes cast were in favour of the first alternative; the actual voting was 93,095 to 67,492. In July the Trusteeship Council passed a resolution noting that the will of the majority of the inhabitants was for union with an independent Gold Coast and recommending "that appropriate steps be taken in consultation with the administering authority for the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the Territory to become effective upon the attainment of independence by the Gold Coast." It is expected that this recommendation will be considered and, I imagine, endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November.

Commonwealth Membership

17. It has been explained to Dr. Nkrumah that "independence within the Commonwealth" does not *of itself* convey membership of the Commonwealth and that the latter requires the consent of all existing members. The Prime Minister wrote to the other Commonwealth Prime Ministers in July about Gold Coast membership of the Commonwealth, asking them whether they would agree in principle to accept an application for Commonwealth membership from the Gold Coast on the assumption that self-government was reached. If they agreed, it was proposed to send a further message when the question of membership had been raised and had become actual. All the Prime Ministers have in effect conveyed their agreement although the Union Prime Minister has done so grudgingly. The stage for a further message has not yet come; and I propose that we should consider its timing and form nearer the date of independence.

Recommendations

18. The conditions in my statement of 11th May have been fulfilled and in my view we are therefore committed to accepting the request of the new Gold Coast Government and Assembly for early independence. I accordingly recommend that—

- (a) we should inform the Gold Coast Government forthwith that Her Majesty's Government will at the first available opportunity introduce into Parliament a Bill to accord independence to the Gold Coast, and that, subject to Parliamentary approval, it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government that independence should take effect on 6th March, 1957;
- (b) I should make this decision public during the first fortnight of September (subject to (c) below) by means of a statement in Parliament (if sitting); otherwise by publication of a despatch to the Governor;
- (c) other Commonwealth Governments should be given prior notice of our intention to proceed as in (a) and (b) above, our High Commissioners being given suitable briefing;
- (d) the Cabinet should without further preliminaries authorise the preparation of the Bill required under (a) above and should invite the Legislation Committee to consider, as a matter of urgency, the steps needed to give it the requisite time and facilities early in the next Session. The Bill would be in the same general form as the Ceylon Independence Act of 1947, and would provide, in accordance with local wishes, that the name of the country should be GHANA. Provisions would have to be included to cover the incorporation in this new country of the Protectorate and Togoland, which are not at present part of Her Majesty's dominions; the precise form of these provisions presents some technical difficulty and is still being studied;
- (e) the question of Commonwealth membership should be taken up separately as indicated in paragraph 17 above.

A. L.-B.

ANNEX A

TEXT OF PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT, 11th MAY, 1956

With permission I wish to make a statement about certain developments in the Gold Coast.

As the House knows, the present Gold Coast Constitution marked the last stage before the assumption by the Gold Coast of full responsibility for its own affairs. The grant of such responsibility is a matter for the United Kingdom Government and Parliament and it has always been the wish of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom that the Gold Coast should achieve its independence within the Commonwealth.

Since the present Constitution was introduced there has arisen a dispute within the Gold Coast about the form of Constitution which that country should have when it achieves independence within the Commonwealth.

Efforts have been made to bring about a reconciliation between the major parties but they have so far met with no success.

I have been in close touch with the Prime Minister of the Gold Coast on these matters. It is the considered view of his Government that the time has now come for the Gold Coast to assume full responsibility within the Commonwealth for its own affairs. I have made my view clear to him that because of the failure to resolve the Constitutional dispute we can only achieve our common aim of the early independence of that country within the Commonwealth in one way and in one way alone; that is to demonstrate to the world that the peoples of the Gold Coast have had a full and free opportunity to consider their Constitution and to express their views on it in a general election. I have told Dr. Nkrumah that if a general election is held Her Majesty's Government will be ready to accept a motion calling for independence within the Commonwealth passed by a reasonable majority in a newly-elected Legislature and then to declare a firm date for this purpose.

Full membership of the Commonwealth is of course a different question and is a matter for consultation between all existing members of the Commonwealth.