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POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE ONE-PARTY STATES OF TROPICAL AFRICA

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OVER the last few years, two tendencies in African politics have become most marked. The first tendency has been, the vast expansion of executive powers, dwarfing thereby the importance of other organized institutions. This has given rise to authoritarianism which, depending upon the circumstances, has taken different forms in different countries. Some authoritarian governments, for instance, may show greater degree of adherence to formal rules and legal procedures than others. Some may try to promote political participation at the grass-roots level, without affecting any substantial alteration in the structure of central authority. Nevertheless, the common feature everywhere, has been a concentration of powers in the executive, represented either by a single individual, or a group, or a combination of representatives from different segments of society.

The second tendency has been the imposition of one-party rule through legal-constitutional or other means. Historically speaking, few African countries have experienced the working of a competitive, multi-party system, and as we shall try to show, where more than one party were in existence, the ruling elite, possessing repressive powers of the state, went about absorbing or routing all political organizations, other than the one to which it belonged.

The two tendencies described above have become so inextricably mixed that it would be difficult to say as to which caused or preceded the other. It is quite possible that in some countries (e.g., Tanzania, Malawi, and Guinea) where nationalist movements came under the control of a single party, the tendency towards one-party rule was inherent in the post-colonial situation. For, in such cases, the party in power was already in a position to back executive dominance. In some other countries (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia) the ruling party was by no means able to extend its control over the whole arena of national politics. This made it difficult for the leaders to consolidate their executive authority within the limits of a competitive party system. In such cases, as later developments illustrate, the rulers adopted other means, including the banning and suppression of opposition, to create conditions for one-party rule. In so doing, however, the character of the party in power underwent basic changes.

There have also been cases when a post-independent regime set

about erecting the edifice of single-party system only to meet with frustration at the end. This is precisely what took place in Sierra Leone and Uganda. In Sierra Leone, the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) made preparations for the establishment of its own version of one-party rule following the 1967 elections. But the unexpected victory of the opposition party, the African People's Congress (APC), upset these calculations. For a time, the military took control of the country's affairs. In Uganda, also, after Obote had successfully dethroned the Kabaka, the ruling Uganda Peoples Congress took determined steps, including the publication of a Common Man's Charter, to bring the country under its complete control. The process was however cut short by the *coup* of January 1971.

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS

At one stage of early post-independent developments in Africa, it came to be generally believed, that one-party rule suited the African genius. At the same time, care was taken to point out that the elimination of political competition and banning of opposition groups did not mean the end of democracy. On the contrary, a mystique grew up about the supposed consensus of traditional African life which, it was maintained, the modern leaders of Africa were attempting to revive. These arguments in favour of one-party rule were further elaborated by the Africans themselves. They pointed out that in view of the manifold tasks confronting the new nations, it was but essential that political power should rest in a unified leadership as represented by the governing party. This was the "crisis-theory" which Nkrumah developed when he described Africa's problems as "almost analogous to a state of war and national emergency which is always met in older established countries by the formation of coalition or national government". Accordingly, it was maintained, that opposition based on multi-party competition was but a luxury in African conditions. Further, the lack of adequate resources and manpower required that national resources be mobilized fully, rather than frittered away in fruitless squabbles among the parties. Moreover, taking into consideration the highly differentiated bases of the new states, it was not difficult to drive home the point that the activities of opposition groups would aggravate tribalistic tensions, thus impairing progress towards national integration. It was also pointed out that such groups would work hand in hand with external agencies to subvert national independence.

Since class differences did not fully crystallize, Africans maintained

that they did not see any reason for the formation of more than one party on the lines of party systems in the developed countries. This was a favourite theme which prospered on the Marxist interpretation of parties as being the concrete expression of class differences in society. Developing the theme in a speech on 'African and Democracy', Nyerere argued: "Traditionally, the African knows no 'class'. I doubt if there is a word in any African language which is equivalent to 'class' or 'caste'; not even in those few societies where foreign infiltration has left behind some form of aristocracy is there such a word in the local languages."¹

Fortified by these arguments, various African governments proceeded to establish one-party rule with a set of fairly common measures. These measures can be grouped under three heads: (1) neutralization or conversion of the opposition; (2) associational integration, and (3) constitutional innovations. The first method is fairly known to the governing elites everywhere in the world. What it involves, simply, is that the rulers must reward those who support them and punish those who do not. During the first few years of independence, a fairly large number of opposition groups crossed over to the side of the ruling parties, as they realized the futility of retaining their separate identity. The most singular instance in this regard was that of the KADU party in Kenya which had consistently resisted the centralizing demand of KANU, until a year after independence, it decided to merge with the latter. In Ghana, on the other hand, opposition parties refused to merge with the CPP. This called for the employment of punitive measures not only against opposition leaders but also against those elements which supported them. Hence, those regions which consistently voted against government were denied developmental grants, so that they might know that recalcitrance would not pay either in the short or in the long run. Where subtler techniques of neutralizing the opposition failed, preventive detention, Press censorship, imprisonment and exile of opposition leaders became a routine prior to the imposition of one-party rule.

The second category of activities consisted of co-opting into the network of the ruling party other organizations and associations. This was achieved partly by establishing links with the existing trade unions, youth groups, and voluntary organizations, and partly by framing such laws as would render any activity outside the party well-nigh impossible. In spite of these steps, achievement of the ruling party in this direction was not impressive. In Ghana, trade union movements remained by and large independent of the CPP, in Mali and Guinea

only formal links were established between the voluntary associations and governing parties.²

The third category of activities comprised electoral and constitutional innovations. One of the most common and effective innovations had been the single-list electoral system, by which all members of a national legislature were elected on a single slate. In many French-African States, the adoption of this method gave the ruling party all seats in the legislature. In the ex-British colonies, the legislations covering elections were somewhat cumbersome. In Tanzania, where TANU had secured all but one seat in the National Assembly, it became comparatively easy to initiate constitutional changes in favour of one-party democracy. In Kenya, KANU-KADU merger, resulted in a *de facto* one-party system. But the formation in 1966 of Kenya People's Union (KPU), under the leadership of the dismissed Vice-President, Oginga Odinga, unsettled the political situation. After two years of bitter inter-party feuds, KPU was banned and a further set of electoral laws were framed to prevent any one outside KANU from contesting the 1976 elections. In Ghana, the CPP's unitary powers were enhanced by the adoption of the Republican Constitution in 1960. A few years later, a second referendum held in January 1964, made Ghana formally a one-party state.

Thus, it would appear that, starting from different points and with different constitutional arrangements, the new states moved without fail in the direction of one-party rule.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTIES

Given the language of African politics, it can be explained why, at one time the African nationalist leaders regarded parties as the most important vehicle of political and social change. First and foremost, the party represented a common front of the subject peoples against colonial rule. Secondly, whereas the party was an original handiwork of the nationalist leaders, the administrative structure inherited from the colonialists was regarded by them as not only alien but also unreliable. As a natural corollary, they harboured a host of suspicions about the civil servants (trained in the colonial set up), belonging to both indigenous and "expatriate" staff. Thirdly, in order to Africanize administration, the party came to be treated as a reservoir from which new recruits could be drawn. Along with this, there was the overpowering urgency to weld different segments within the—as yet nebulous—structures of national society for which, again, the party was

found more trustworthy than the administration.

In order, therefore, to build the post-colonial order, the rulers assigned a multiplicity of tasks to the party. They comprised, to quote Zolberg:

...supervision, control and coordination of all other instruments of government; supplying individual and communal incentives for development; training both adults and children for citizenship in the new nations; serving as the concrete expression of that nation; acting as the major channel of communication between the leaders and population and between the centre and localities, both downward by instructing the population concerning decisions programs, and tasks, and upwards in securing for the leaders necessary information and support.³

In short, the party became co-terminous with the State. In those states, characterized by Coleman and Rosberg as "revolutionary-centralizing", there was a greater emphasis on the mobilizing role of the party; but in other states, such as the Ivory Coast and Kenya, where also the party system closed outside competition, there was by and large no such emphasis.

A distinction must however be made between political intentions and political reality. For several reasons, the party failed to carry out the load placed on its shoulders. With the attainment of political power, those elements which had joined the nationalist movement, began to fall apart and adopt mutually exclusive, even hostile, postures. Besides, with the induction of its abler cadre into the government, the party lost its original vitality. Those who stayed behind were so poorly paid that they constantly looked forward to getting government jobs. With this drain in personnel, confusion arose regarding the definitive roles of party and government. Which of the two had precedence over the other? Or, was there no difference at all? Even in Mali, where the Union Soundanaise was more strongly organized than its counterparts elsewhere, such confusions arose so that, in 1962, a decree was issued which stated: "the party formulates general policies which are then executed by the government, but it does not follow that party officials have authority over government officials!"^{3a}

II

With this introductory note, one might go on to make a com

parative survey of some of the one party regimes in Africa. In the case of Ghana where the Convention People's Party (CPP) had established formal monopoly of power in 1964, a prolonged crisis in the country's economy and, also, social unrest, finally resulted in its fall. Ousting President Kwame Nkrumah, the military seized power in February 1966. In the Ivory Coast, on the other hand, where the Parti Democratique de Cote d' Ivoire (PDCI), established a single-party regime since the country's independence in 1960, the political system has proved not only durable, but also capable of enunciating an era of uninterrupted economic growth. From the West African region, we shall take up the cases of Ghana and the Ivory Coast as illustrations of the one-party regime—one of which has collapsed while the other continues to survive. From East and Central Africa, we will take as case-studies the experiments on single-party democracy as initiated by Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in Tanzania and by United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia.

It is at this point that we should also take note of the individual characteristics of these four states. For, as will become clear from the discussion that follows, no single factor accounts for the emergence of one-party rule in Africa. For instance, if it were maintained that a particular set of social and economic circumstances determine and shape the 'super-structure' of a state, it would then be hard to locate such a set of circumstances in the case of these four countries. From a strictly economic viewpoint, the Ivory Coast with its \$220 per capita income may be regarded as one of the wealthiest countries of Africa. At the opposite end of the scale stands Tanzania with a per capita income of only \$ 64, which, even from African standards, is very low. In both the Ivory Coast and Ghana, a large proportion of the population is engaged in raising cash crop production. Yet, whereas the Ivory Coast has, over the years, been able to diversify its products and markets for export, Ghana has remained more or less dependent on cocoa production as a major source of external income. Barring a small enclave of cash crop, the Tanzanian economy consists mainly of subsistence agriculture; whereas the great mining industries on the copper-belt of Zambia have given rise to a peculiar economy in which subsistence agriculture exists side by side an advanced capital-intensive sector. This accounts for the imbalance and disparity in income between the rural and urban areas.

Again, from the point of view of social stratification, the formation of classes on the basis of wealth, status, and life-style in the Ghanaian society has become, in spite of assertions to the contrary, very

well-marked. Similarly, in the Ivory Coast a wealthy class of farmers has emerged which has no counterpart in either Tanzania or Zambia. Ethnically, both Zambia and the Ivory Coast contain a large number of tribal and linguistic groups which come in the way of constructing a national society. On the other hand, although there is a multiplicity of tribes in the Tanzanian mainland, the pervasive influence of Swahili language and culture have helped to build the bonds of social intercourse between them. In Ghana, the central position occupied by the Fanti-speaking tribes has made it possible for the Ghanaians to develop a territorial identity.

Finally, in terms of colonial rule, each territory has undergone a different experience. French rule in the Ivory Coast was different both in style and objectives from the British rule in the Gold Coast. Tanganyika was a German colony until the end of the First World War, when it was mandated to Britain by the League of Nations. From a very early period the Gold Coast was developed as a colony for the cultivation of cash crops. The discovery of copper in Northern Rhodesia and its geographical proximity to the expanding mining-industrial complex of South Africa it made, from the days of the British South Africa Company (BSA), a territory suitable for European settlement. As a result, the racial factor became a marked feature of the colonial set-up in Northern Rhodesia.

It would thus be seen that each of these four African territories is endowed with certain unique characteristics which we must keep in sight in order to understand their political systems. At the same time, the fact that, at some point or other, they all have come under one-party rule allows us to enlarge the scope of our inquiry regarding the nature and character of African politics and government in general. In the pages that follow, we shall try to conduct our inquiry on the following lines: (a) the circumstances favouring, or determining, the rise of one-party system; (b) the role of the party in sustaining, limiting and influencing the operative part of the system; (c) the capabilities, goals and achievements of the political system. At the end, we shall try to put together what we consider to be the important results of this investigation.

THE IVORY COAST

"The political system of the Ivory Coast", wrote Zolberg, "is the heritage of the recent nationalist past. To substantiate the statement, it is necessary that we take into account some specific aspects of the

political evolution of the territory from colonial rule to independence.

Originating from a small farmers' association, the PDCI came into being in April 1946 and soon represented a broad alliance of diverse ethnic and voluntary organizations in the country. Meanwhile, as member of the French Constituent Assembly, Houphouët-Boigny co-sponsored a law which abolished all forms of forced labour in the colonies. This secured for him immense prestige among all sections of the Ivorians.

At the federal level, the formation of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA) in 1947, provided another arena of activity to the PDCI. For sometime, the extra-militant posture of the RDA and its connexions with the French Communist Party lent a sort of radicalism to the PDCI, which was one of its constituents. Between 1951 and 1956, Houphouët-Boigny used his own position as President of the RDA to secure for the Ivory Coast protected markets for its commodities and preferential allocation of French aid for development. Boigny's prestige swelled the party's fortune. At all levels, from Paris down to the lowest administrative district, the PDCI men were consulted by French officials in matters concerning the Government of the Ivory Coast.⁴

By 1956, the PDCI came to resemble a broad coalition of rich planters, traders, foreign-born Africans and tribal notables. Its office-bearers were hand-picked men of Houphouët-Boigny himself. Usually, the party officials, avoided making no large demands on members and supporters, other than that they should vote for the party and pledge loyalty to the leader. This was the 'political formula' on the basis of which the PDCI contested the 1957 elections, obtaining 89 per cent of the votes cast and filling 58 of the 60 seats in the Territorial Assembly. Ever since, the electoral system ensured complete victory of the party in all successive polls. In both the 1959 and 1960 elections, the candidates sponsored by the PDCI got 100 per cent votes and secured all seats in the Assembly.

Since independence, the Ivorian political system has resided exclusively in the hands of an individual who remains, formally, only an Honorary President of the PDCI—Felix Houphouët-Boigny. It is he who presides over and lends legitimacy to the three institutions of the State: the government, the party, and the National Assembly. All important appointments in the administration, the army and the party are made by him. He also selects the thirty-five members of the important advisory body, the *Conseil Economique et Social* and, with the party's *Bureau Politique*, chooses the members of the National

Assembly.

Since 1960, the attempt has been to co-opt traditional authorities into the structures of the party and government. There is a Chiefs body called the *Syndicat des Chefs*, headed by Houphouët-Boigny himself. In the rural areas, PDCI branches are organized in a way which reinforces the links based on ethnicity. In the economic sphere, the regime has put more emphasis on sustained growth rather than on social justice.

The second factor underlying the durability of the regime pertains to the deliberate policy pursued by the rulers to keep popular participation at a low key. The lack of popular participation has been defended on the ground that what the people need most is not democracy, but paternalist guidance from above. For this reason, the Party's role as a catalyst of social and political change has not been magnified. Instead, the leadership has remained content in stressing that popular participation should be conceived as "active acquiescence in the policies of the government."⁵

The primacy of the government over the party organization represents the third important feature of the PDCI model. It is a centralized bureaucracy, filled by the President's nominees and French expatriates, which runs the central services through six departments and 107 sub-prefectures. This bureaucracy has amassed vast powers of coercion and intimidation for use against its opponents whenever the need arises. Yet, by and large, Houphouët-Boigny has preferred the conciliatory to coercive methods to obtain legitimacy for his government.

It is easy to dismiss the Ivorian political system as elitist or authoritarian, or, as Virginia Thompson sees it, a "one man, one party government."⁶ Those who over-emphasize the ties maintained by the Ivory Coast with the ex-metropole, would be tempted to call it a "satellite neo-colonialist state". Indeed, the African radical leaders, in particular Nkrumah, have always regarded the Ivory Coast in that light. Yet, the character and capabilities of a political system must be judged in relation to the goals it has set for itself. Domestically, the primary aim of the PDCI has been to legitimize its control of power through the support of an elitist strata of an ethnically divided society. For this purpose, it has deliberately set about forming a privileged class—a farming-cum-commercial bourgeoisie—by providing scope for free private enterprise in the economic sphere. In order to ensure a continuous flow of economic benefits, the regime has rejected any doctrinaire formula.

At the same time, the strategy of inviting help from external capital

and expertise has proved an undoubted success. Between 1958 and 1965, total gross domestic product (GDP) in the Ivory Coast increased by 125 per cent in money terms, or at an annual rate of increase of almost 15 per cent. Its export earnings grew at a compound rate of 11 per cent annually. Increased savings from revenues provided for a higher proportion of total investment—about two-thirds—during the same period. Public and private (mainly external) sources accounted for an increase in the industrial turnover from 19,800 million francs at current rate value in 1962 to 722,000 million in 1969. The turnover of building firms rose from 23,300 million to 58,200 million francs between 1960 and 1965, while the index of commercial turn-over rose from 100 in 1964 to 129 in 1968.

It would thus appear that, in terms of its own goals, the Ivory Coast has managed to show a degree of success which has eluded the grasp of most African states. In doing so, it has succeeded in bridging, at least in the short run, the gulf between profession and practice. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether the system is capable of sustaining itself.

There are several levels at which the PDCI Government might begin to face greater opposition. First, the expansion of economic opportunities notwithstanding, uneven income distribution has accentuated tensions between the privileged and the under-privileged groups. Meanwhile, disparity between the urban and rural population has also widened. Between 1955 and 1970 the population of Abidjan has increased from 125,000 to 500,000. Despite impoverishment among farm labourers and tenants, 60 per cent of the jobs are located in the urban areas containing only 14.5 per cent of the population. As urban population has increased, so have also urban unrest and unemployment.

In the political arena, the PDCI officials have remained mostly engaged in jockeying for posts and favours at the capital. In some ways, indeed, the capital has tended to devour the country. The generation gap between the party militants and the younger men has affected the whole range of social relations. At the same time, resentment against the foreigners, especially in the towns, has taken a turn for the worse.

In these circumstances, a violent reaction to the PDCI oligarchy cannot be ruled out. It is possible that on the demise of President Houphouët-Boigny, great political uncertainty may arise over the issue of succession. The over-centralized structure of the regime may then begin to fall. In such an event, the army, though small in size, may decide to take matters into its own hands.

GHANA

Two durable groups became active in Ghana (then Gold Coast) politics since the 1920s. These were the Chiefs and the intelligentsia. The British policy of indirect rule ensured for the Chiefs an effective role in local and provincial administration. The system of indirect representation also gave them a majority of African seats in the legislature and, at a later stage, participation in the executive council. The intelligentsia, on the other hand largely concentrated their activities in the urban areas.

In 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was founded by J.B. Danquah, a lawyer; George A. Grant, a businessman; Francis A. Williams and R.S. Blay. From the United Kingdom, Nkrumah was invited to return and take over the post of General Secretary. The UGCC was organized around an executive committee with its major headquarters at Sekondi, Cape Coast, and Accra. Its objective was "to ensure that the direction and control of government in the Gold Coast shall pass into the hands of the people and their Chiefs in the shortest possible time."

After the war, great changes were, however, taking place in the Ghanaian society. There was a wave of unrest among the commoner sections of the people, i.e., the dissatisfied younger elements recently arrived in the towns; the small but articulate group of journalists; ex-servicemen and teachers, and the rapidly growing number of semi-industrial workers.⁷ Spiralling inflation, a disease in cocoa shoots which decreased production, and the upward thrust of the semi-educated school-leavers spread dissatisfaction like a bushfire among the city and country dwellers. All this resulted in the Accra riots of 1948.

The riots were not in themselves serious: a group of ex-servicemen were fired upon when they defied police orders, resulting in the death of two persons and a handful of injured. But the incident had wide political repercussions. It served as a signal for the malcontents to rise and call for redress which, in the particular colonial circumstances, turned out to be a demand for ending British rule. As a result, some leaders, including Nkrumah were taken into custody. The arrest of Nkrumah made him a hero in the eyes of his own followers. In June 1949, under pressures from the party youth, Nkrumah resigned from the UGCC and formed the Convention People's Party (CPP). Six months later, on 8 January 1950, he launched his famous "positive action", with the demand for self-government, "here and now".

A variety of factors combined to make the CPP a mass movement within a year of its inception. The CPP demand for "self-government" galvanized the Ghanaian people. When elections were held on the basis of the recommendation of the Coussey Commission, the CPP won 38 municipal and rural seats, with a popular vote of roughly 59,000, as against the combined opposition vote of 6,000. The UGCC obtained only two seats in the Assembly. Accepting the results as a fair and free verdict of the people, the Governor invited Nkrumah to form the territory's first African government.

On forming government, the CPP faced great many problems. Those who had considered themselves as lawful "heirs to the throne" were in no mood to concede defeat. The Chiefs in Ashanti began mobilizing political support through the medium of the youth groups which had earlier gone over to the side of the CPP. The next set of dangers came from within the ranks of the Party who had joined it with the hope of promoting their individual and local interests. It was rapidly becoming clear to the CPP Government that it did not have the resources to satisfy or control these elements. At the same time, it knew that failure in this regard would lead to massive defections. The third set of dangers came from the great spiralling of demands emanating from all ranks of society.

Right from its inception, then, the CPP Government faced a grim struggle for survival. In order to parry the attacks of its opponents, it sought to rally the discontented elements around its own structure by further stimulating their aspirations. But the more it did so, the more it found it difficult to maintain discipline among its own ranks. Organizationally, it was the movement which thus swallowed up the party.

In an article published in 1967, Dennis Austin raised a few pointed questions: "Why did the CPP eliminate its opponents? Why did the opposition leaders give every excuse to the CPP to adopt such a policy? And what are the obstacles to an openly competitive system within which there is room for government and opposition, policy decisions and criticisms, authority and freedom?"

To answer these questions, first of all, it is necessary to know the people who came to power after the 1951 elections. The mass of teachers, clerks, school-leavers, and urban workers who joined the CPP did not compose a class. What was unique was that, while holding political power, these people lacked social power to match their official position. Once elected, they realized that it was only through their political offices that they could advance their economic