



British Colonial Ghana

The “Gold Coast” colony included African societies like the Asante kingdom (empire), which had class divisions, a ruling elite, and a history of slavery and slave trading. The colony was ruled by British officials, African kings and chiefs, and the small African educated and business elite linked to mission and state schools.

But Britain was in charge. Society was top-down. There was no pretence of “democracy.” Although the British provided railways and hospitals, there was much poverty and racism. The economy was based on selling raw materials (metals and cash crops) to Britain. This meant it depended on British prices, and these were often low and there was always pressure by the British state to produce more.

Decolonisation

After World War Two (1939–1945) there was massive unrest by the unemployed in the in Sekondi-Takoradi (“Tadi”) port zone and Accra, by farmers and black ex- soldiers. There were riots in 1948 after 3 people were shot at a march in Accra. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) formed 1945, called a general strike in 1950.

Britain started political reforms in the 1940s, allowing unions (1941) and then allowing more elected representatives in the Legislative Council (1946) but these were elections by chiefs

The elite-led United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) (1947) wanted electoral reforms, moving the chiefs aside, so the businessmen who led UGCC would have more say. Like the ANC and other South African parties, UGCC was formed and dominated by the frustrated African elite. It kept its distance from the unrest, and from Nkrumah’s calls to use mass action (“positive action”) to win more radical changes. Nkrumah had 4 university degrees earned in the USA, where he lived from 1935- 1945, and returned to his homeland in 1947 after 2 years in Britain.

This led to the formation of Nkrumah’s breakaway CPP (1949), aiming to ride the mass struggles to full state independence. In 1951 there were the first parliamentary elections (the country was still ruled by Britain), which the CPP won, making Nkrumah Prime Minister. After more elections, the CPP led Ghana into independence.

Consolidation of New Elite

But the new CPP government developed into a one-party state. The state became a hothouse for a new elite. The old elite, the chiefs, were either marginalised or pulled into the CPP. A law in 1958 allowed detention without trial. By 1962 the state controlled the main newspapers, and could censor news.

