

## **The Political and Economic Impacts of WWII on the Gold Coast of West Africa**

### **Les impacts politiques et économiques de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur la Côte de l'Or de l'Afrique de l'Ouest**

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#### **Abstract**

The Second World War broke out in September 1939, lasted for six years, and cost millions of lives. Although Europe was the major battlefield of the war, Africa was involved in the hostilities through the participation of thousands of African soldiers in the fighting, in some parts of the African continent, in Europe, and in Asia. Indeed, the Second World War created a need for the engagement of colonial armies to fight for Britain, especially after the advance of German Nazism and Italian Fascism in Europe.

This paper examines the circumstances that led Britain to have recourse to her West African colonies, particularly the Gold Coast, in order to keep up her war effort during the Second World War, in Europe and elsewhere. It also attempts to shed light on the political as well as the economic impacts of the Gold Coasters' direct involvement in this war.

**Keywords:** British West Africa – Gold Coast Colony – WWII – politics – economy

#### **Résumé**

La Seconde Guerre mondiale a éclaté en septembre 1939, a duré six ans et a coûté des millions de vies. Bien que l'Europe ait été le principal champ de bataille de la guerre, l'Afrique a été impliquée dans les hostilités à travers la participation de milliers de soldats africains aux combats, dans différentes parties du monde. En effet, la Seconde Guerre mondiale a créé un besoin pour l'engagement des armées coloniales à se battre pour la Grande-Bretagne, surtout après l'avancée du nazisme allemand et du fascisme italien en Europe.

Cet article examine les circonstances qui ont conduit la Grande-Bretagne à recourir à ses colonies ouest-africaines, notamment la Côte de l'Or (l'actuel Ghana), afin de poursuivre son effort de guerre pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, en Europe et ailleurs. Il tente

également de faire la lumière sur les impacts politiques et économiques de l'implication directe des africains dans cette guerre.

**Mots-clés :** Afrique occidentale britannique - Colonie de la Côte de l'Or - Seconde Guerre mondiale - politique – économie

## **Introduction**

The effect of WWII on the Blacks in general, and on Africans in particular, was greater than that of WWI. During WWII, Africans encountered peoples from almost all over the world when they fought by the side of the Allied Powers in Africa, Europe, and Asia. This contact had a deep psychological impact on the African soldier, widened his political horizons, and changed his attitude to the white man. If WWI gave impetus to nationalist thinking in the Gold Coast and brought about a more determined African philosophy of protest, the outbreak of WWII led to a lull in Gold Coast nationalism due to the fact that the war events dominated the political scene the world over. By the end of the hostilities, new political parties were born in the Gold Coast with a more radical outlook which stressed on self-government, marking thus a change in political outlook among the Gold Coasters.

## **I- The Gold Coast and the Second World War**

Despite all the international measures agreed upon by the Allies in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (mainly the establishment of the League of Nations) to spare the world other destructive confrontations similar to those of World War I, a Second World War broke out in September 1939, a war which lasted for six years and cost millions of lives. Like in the Great War, Europe was again the major battlefield of the Second World War; nevertheless, Africa was involved in the hostilities through the participation of African soldiers in the fighting, in some parts of the African continent, in Europe, and in Asia. In fact, the Second World War created a need for the engagement of colonial troops to fight for Britain, especially after the advance of German Nazism and Italian Fascism in Europe. West Africa in particular provided Britain with manpower and raw materials to keep up her war effort. David Killingray stated that though it was difficult to give exact figures of West Africans who had been involved in direct war-work, by the end of WWII over two hundred thousand of them had served in the British army as soldiers and laborers in East and North Africa, and Asia (Killingray, 83: 1982).

## 1- The Gold Coast in WWII

Many Gold Coast Africans found themselves directly involved in a war that did not concern them directly, and in which they served as soldiers, carriers, and laborers. According to Eugene Schleh, among the four hundred and seventy thousand Africans recruited by Britain during World War II, about sixty-five thousand were from the Gold Coast (Schleh, 203: 1968).<sup>1</sup> The Gold Coast pre-war regular army, the Gold Coast Regiment (G.C.R.) of the Royal West African Frontier Force (R.W.A.F.F.), was under the control of the Colonial Office and consisted in a small infantry force of about one thousand men only, whose main function was to defend the frontiers and give help to the civil power. However, with the outbreak of WWII, the G.C.R. was expanded in order to contribute to the defense of West Africa, to fight against the Italians in East Africa, and to participate in the Burma Campaign of 1944-45 (Killingray, 84: 1982). The Gold Coast servicemen's direct involvement in the hostilities was to greatly affect their thinking and to change their attitudes to Europeans in general, and to the British in particular. In like manner, the Gold Coast people's contribution to the war effort through building airfields, military installations and accommodation played a crucial role in the growth of their political consciousness and nationalist feeling. Mazrui and Tidy asserted that:

“... the direct involvement of many hundreds of thousands of Africans in the war, either in theatres of war in Africa itself, or in Asia or Europe, contributed enormously to the eventual victory of African political nationalism over the next quarter of a century.” (11: 1984)

The Gold Coast soldiers served in different parts of the continent during WWII. The G.C.R. arrived in Kenya in July 1940, and the soldiers were soon involved in heavy combats in East Africa against Italian troops in Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland (Lawler, 57: 2002). In the same year, Italy entered the war and joined the Nazi camp, thereby cutting the Mediterranean route to Britain's Far East empire and depriving the British and their allies of a strategic war position: the Mediterranean Sea. The situation became even worse for the Allied Powers when France fell to the Nazis in the summer of 1940, as French surrender implied the loss of their North African bases. As a result, West African harbors and airfields became of vital importance to the Allies' war effort, and an expansion of the G.C.R. became an urgent step, especially when French forces, now under the Vichy regime which collaborated with the German Nazis, constituted a potential threat to British West Africa which was surrounded by French territory. The G.C.R. and the main fighting units of the R.W.A.F.F. had been sent to East Africa, leaving the territory defenseless, so further recruitment became necessary

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<sup>1</sup>. This number is estimated to about sixty-nine thousand by Adrienne M. Israel (361: 1992).

(Jackson, 225: 2006). As the Gambia represented the most vulnerable British colony, Gold Coast troops were sent there by the middle of 1940 to defend it against the Vichy threat. Furthermore, when the Japanese seized the sources of supply in the Far East in early 1942, the British turned their attention to their West African colonies for agricultural and mineral supplies. The production of vegetable oils, timber and rubber, and the exploitation of bauxite which was needed for the provision of the aluminum required for aircraft construction dramatically increased in the Gold Coast (Gocking, 76: 2005). This renewed interest in West African raw materials provided new opportunities for economic progress, as it required the development of communication infrastructures, the provision of transport facilities, and the building and expansion of harbors and airfields.

The strategic geographical position of the Gold Coast made the Colony then an important base for the Allied forces. As air traffic, military shipments, imports and exports significantly increased during the war years, airfields and harbors in the Gold Coast had to be enlarged to meet such dramatic and abrupt developments. Gocking wrote that:

“In 1941 the U.S. army air force was established in Accra, and during the peak years of 1942 and early 1943 as many as 200 to 300 American planes stopped daily at Accra for checking and refueling, on their way north or east.” (76: 2005)

Therefore, a large military base was built in Accra by a joint effort of American technicians and Gold Coast contractors and artisans. Also, British and American planes were landed at the port and airfield of Takoradi and were assembled there by the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.), so an expansion of these facilities was necessary to cope with the regular cargoes of the American forces and the R.A.F. (Bourret, 147-48: 1960).<sup>2</sup>

In 1942 a Cabinet minister was appointed to be resident in West Africa in order to co-ordinate for the British interests there, particularly with regard to the war effort, as the four British West African colonies had become in constant and direct contact with American, British, Belgian, and Free French military and civil officers. Lord Swinton (1884-1972), formerly Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, who had been Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1931 to 1935, was chosen for this

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<sup>2</sup> Lawler (52: 2002) wrote that by June 1941, about 200 planes a month were assembled in Takoradi, and the number reached 290 planes a month by November of the same year.

position, and as soon as he arrived in West Africa in the summer of 1942, he established a West African War Council consisting of the four colonial governors and the commanders of the army, navy, and air force in West Africa (Bourret, 148: 1960). The headquarters of this Council was the Gold Coast, a choice favored by the country's location in the center of the four British West African territories. The Gold Coast served then as the center from which every strategic and economic phase of the war was coordinated by Lord Swinton. It was clear, therefore, that the Gold Coast became fully involved in WWII, and its contribution to the war effort was cardinal not only to the British but to all the Allied front as well.

The most significant contribution of the Gold Coast to WWII was the participation of about thirty thousand of its soldiers in the Burma Campaign against the Japanese forces in South-east Asia, where they proved very suited to the tropical conditions (Israel, 361: 1992).<sup>3</sup> Gold Coast troops left for Burma in June 1943, in two successive divisions of the R.W.A.F.F., and most of them fought in a mountainous area in south-western Burma which was under Japanese control. Despite the difficulty and inaccessibility of the terrains where the fighting took place, "*... these young Africans, accustomed as they were to tropical conditions, remained among the fittest of the jungle troops*" (Bourret, 145: 1960). It is not surprising, therefore, that what the Gold Coasters, and more particularly the soldiers, had experienced during a war into which they had been involved by their British colonizers would have a great impact on them.

WWII brought the Gold Coasters into closer touch with international events and currents of thought. It gave the men who served in the G.C.R., most of whom were illiterate,<sup>4</sup> the opportunity to learn new military and technical skills, such as handling modern and sophisticated weapons and driving vehicles. In addition, a great number of them received rudimentary instruction, an achievement that enabled them to stay informed about events that were taking place in different parts of the world through reading newspapers and listening to wireless bulletins (Mazrui and Tidy, 20: 1984). Equally important was the role of the war in changing the G.C.R. troops' vision about the white men. The Gold Coast soldiers made the acquaintance of thousands of illiterate white soldiers who worked with their hands, and met Whites who opposed colonialism and were not racially prejudiced about the black race. Those who served on the African

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<sup>3</sup>- Gocking (75-76: 2005) stated that the number of soldiers from the Gold Coast who served overseas during WWII was over forty-one thousand, a considerable number compared to the total number of the Gold Coast soldiers recruited during WWI which was about eleven thousand.

<sup>4</sup>- Despite the high rate of illiteracy among the Gold Coast troops, Adrienne Israel (361: 1992) stated that about 40 percent of those who served in the G.C.R. during WWII were literate tradesmen, a much higher figure in comparison to the other British colonial regiments.

continent saw and heard about white soldiers (British-American-French forces against German-Italian ones) fighting and killing one another. In this respect, Mazrui and Tidy wrote that “*White disunity was a powerful factor in helping the black soldier look at the colonial master race realistically*” (20: 1984). On the other hand, those who fought in Burma and other places in South-East Asia noticed the Japanese soldiers’ military skill which had allowed them to invade such a huge territory and defeat the British troops before. This made them realize that technology and power were not monopolized by the white man. At the same time, during the Burma Campaign they learned about some Indian nationalist movements, like the Indian National Congress (I.N.C.) which was founded in 1885.

Whether in Africa or overseas, the experiences of WWII helped the Gold Coast servicemen shape a new image of their colonizers, as they discovered a new facet of the Europeans they had hitherto not known. Ndabangingi Sithole pointed out that: “*He [the African] saw the so-called civilized and peaceful and orderly white people mercilessly butchering one another just as his so-called savage ancestors had done in tribal wars. He saw no difference between so-called primitive and so-called civilized man*” (Sithole, 47: 1969). The idea of the white man’s might and invincibility which the Africans had long borne in mind was completely altered by wartime experiences, and a new more realistic image replaced the old one. Actually, the Japanese experience and Indian nationalism were two important external factors which marked the Gold Coast servicemen and stirred up their political consciousness. They realized “... *that European empire was not an immutable monolith in the landscape of world history*” (Oliver and Fage, 217: 1995).

## **2- The Political Impact of WWII on the Gold Coasters**

The Japanese experience was very inspiring to the colored peoples in general, and to Africans more particularly, because it proved that the world was not white-centered at a time when humanity’s destiny seemed to be controlled by the white race. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Japan started a series of deep political and social changes, and initiated an important process of modernization which resulted in great military achievements and territorial expansions into the neighboring countries in South-East Asia. The first manifestation of the emergence of a new Japanese power was Japan’s victory in the war against China (1894-1895) for the control of Korea. The most important result of this war was the shift of regional dominance in East Asia from China to Japan. A decade later, Japan led another war against the Russian Empire which

also ended in a total victory over Russian forces, an unexpected victory which further consolidated Japan's position as a world power.

Japan's expansionist ambitions continued, and during WWII the Japanese army forced the British to leave off their Asian colonies like Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, and Singapore; drove the Dutch out of Indonesia; the Americans out of the Philippines; and invaded the easternmost part of British India (Mazrui and Tidy, 16: 1984). To make up for her defeats and reconquer her lost territories, Britain had recourse to her colonial troops, among whom were the Gold Coast ones. Although they fought against the Japanese and eventually drove them out of Burma, the Africans were particularly impressed by the technological and military achievement of the 'yellow men' within a so short lapse of time. The Gold Coast servicemen, like their African counterparts, now looked to their white colonizers' power with a skeptical eye. They no longer believed in the invincibility of the white man, for they discovered that he could also be vanquished, captured, and humiliated despite his so praised 'superior' race and civilization. The contact with the Japanese was undoubtedly an important external factor which contributed to the growth of the Gold Coasters' self-confidence and political awareness. As a non-white race, the Japanese were able to build an empire which defeated some of the mightiest nations at that time and influenced world politics. The Gold Coasters realized that they, too, could possibly face and resist the British colonizers.

In addition to the Japanese experience, WWII gave the G.C.R. troops the opportunity to come close to Indian nationalism during their service in the Burma campaign. This contact sharpened their race-consciousness and encouraged them to press for a redress of grievances. According to Adrienne Israel, "*In India and Burma, educated servicemen from the Gold Coast discussed political issues with Asian nationalists, and decided to try India's protest methods when they returned home*" (159: 1987). Both the Indians and the Gold Coasters were under the same colonial power; therefore, anti-colonial affinities were easily woven between the two peoples. Thus, the impact of Indian nationalism on the Africans was so deep that they adopted some Indian nationalist methods of resistance and protest in the post-war period as a reliable means for the satisfaction of their political demands, especially in the Gold Coast. Mazrui and Tidy stated that "... *in practical terms of influence on Africa's new nationalist political movements after the war, India's impact on Africa has been greater than that of any Asian country*" (16: 1984). However, no Indian leader had had such an enormous impact on the Gold Coasters as Gandhi (the renowned Indian nationalist figure) had done. The philosophy put forward by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), better known as the *Mahatma*<sup>5</sup> Gandhi to protest against abusive laws and ask for

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<sup>5</sup> - *Mahatma*: Great Soul or Saint.

political rights captured the minds of the Gold Coast servicemen and the nationalists later on.

Gandhi was a lawyer who first practiced in South Africa where he devoted himself to the defense of the Indian minority there. By the beginnings of the twentieth century, Gandhi led a movement of protest against some laws (the Indentured Labour Draft Ordinance of 1904, the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance of 1906, and the Immigrants Restriction Act of 1907) introduced by the Transvaal government to restrict the movement of indentured laborers and compel them to carry their identity card everywhere they went (Pattery, 40-41: 2001). Considering such measures as discriminatory and as a form of slavery, Gandhi appealed to the Indians for a general mobilization against these ordinances. The movement which was born out of this struggle, the Passive Resistance Association, decided not to obey the laws. As the movement gained more supporters, Gandhi found the expression 'Passive Resistance' unsatisfactory and, therefore, replaced it with the word '*Satyagraha*': *satya* meaning truth, and *agraha* meaning force or holding firm (Pattery, 41: 2001). *Satyagraha* became later the basis of Gandhi's philosophy of struggle and protest. In explaining the difference between *Satyagraha* and 'passive resistance', Gandhi stated that: "*Satyagraha postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person*" (Pattery, 42: 2001). The philosophy appealed then to faith and advocated non-violence and self-sacrifice.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 to lead the nationalist movement. As a lawyer and a reformist, he accepted the laws which governed the Indian society. Nevertheless, he sought to reform those laws which went against the Indians' aspirations, rejecting violence altogether as a means of protest and using peaceful methods such as non-cooperation, fasting, and sit-ins. The Gold Coasters were impressed by Gandhi's philosophy and its efficiency in extracting gradual constitutional concessions from the British colonial administration in favor of the Indians (Padmore, 175: 1953). Since his arrival to India, the *Mahatma* had devoted himself to the betterment of the people's conditions through his *Satyagraha*, and his achievements made him very famous in the whole country, and even owed him the admiration and respect of the British people. The Gold Coasters' admiration for Indian nationalism increased when Britain eventually granted India independence in 1947 under nationalist pressure from Gandhi and others. The Gold Coast servicemen's presence in Burma gave them, therefore, the occasion to learn some principles of Gandhism from Indian nationalists, some of which – such as strikes, boycotts and non-cooperation – would be employed after the end of WWII to ask for rapid political and economic changes in the Gold



Coast. As Israel put it: “... *those ex-servicemen who had been particularly inspired by India and Burma’s political movements decided to press for independence when they returned to the Gold Coast*” (167: 1987).

Besides the Japanese experience and Indian nationalism, another international factor contributed to the stimulation of nationalism in the Gold Coast. This was the Atlantic Charter which was issued jointly by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on 14 August 1941. A few months later, the Charter was signed by fifteen other nations, all of which resolved to protect the security of all countries by means of an international organization: The United Nations (U.N.) (Nash, 408: 1992). The Charter was meant to establish a vision of a post-WWII world order guided by individual liberty. This Anglo-American declaration was in fact a mixture of President Woodrow Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ stated in a speech he delivered in January 1918 to a joint session of Congress, in which he explained the aims of the American involvement in WWI (namely to restore peace and freedom in Europe); and Roosevelt’s ‘Four Freedoms’ (freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from fear, and freedom from want) proclaimed in January 1941 (Thomson, 210: 1991). The Atlantic Charter contained eight points which carried the principles that were supposedly to govern international relations in the future:

“(1) both parties [the United States and Britain] agreed not to seek territorial expansion; (2) no territorial modifications were to be made without the support of the indigenous people; (3) indigenous people were to be allowed to freely choose their own governments; (4) all states would have the right to access primary resources; (5) the signing parties agree to cooperate for the development of economic and social programmes; (6) after the destruction of the Nazi forces a peace guaranteeing international security will be enforced; (7) freedom of the seas; and (8) a global reduction in armaments.” (Alger, 216: 1998)

The Atlantic Charter brought new hopes for a better world and delighted the colonial peoples, especially those under British domination. They wanted to benefit from the democratic principles for which many of their fellow countrymen lost their lives in a war that had been proclaimed to uphold democracy in the world (Geiss, 364: 1974). Particular attention was given to the third point of the Charter, as it clearly stated the right of every people to choose the form of government under which they would live. This very statement was understood as a promise of self-determination for colonial peoples, and “... *was to reverberate throughout the British Empire and would be cited ad infinitum by nationalists*

*seeking a greater share in the direction of their countries destinies*” (Jackson, 55: 2006). Accordingly, like all countries under the yoke of colonization, the Gold Coast welcomed this Anglo-American document with enthusiasm. The Atlantic Charter enhanced the Gold Coast nationalist leaders’ thirst for freedom and directed their efforts towards the application of its principles to their country. It reflected their aspirations and represented an international recognition of the weaker peoples’ right for self-determination.

Along with the political effects of WWII on the Gold Coast was its outstanding impact on the country’s economy. The war brought about many changes that were to play an important role in the conversion of many Gold Coasters to nationalist actions during the post-war years. As mentioned earlier, during the first years of WWII, British traditional lines of supplies were disrupted, either by war fighting, difficulty and paucity of transport, or lack of foreign currency (Fage, 202: 1969). This created a need for primary products and strategic raw materials that the African colonies could supply. The use of colonial resources became inevitable and even essential to back the war effort. The strategic location of the Gold Coast as a coastal colony and its position in the world market as the world’s greatest producer of cocoa made it one of the most important suppliers of produce needed by Britain. Aware of the dislocations in international trade that a global conflict might cause, the British had taken some measures to avoid the bitter experience of WWI and the recent cocoa hold-up of 1937-38.

### **3- The Impact of WWII on the Gold Coast Economy**

During the Great War, the revenue of the Gold Coast had suffered a great deal, as the lack of shipping space had severely reduced the country’s exports. The exports of cocoa, which was the predominant industry in the Gold Coast, had dramatically fallen because of price fluctuations in world markets, decrease of demand, and the loss of German markets (Killingray, 42: 1978; Alence, 402: 2001). Consequently, cocoa farmers’ incomes had decreased causing a neglect of cocoa farms which in turn had seriously affected the economic and social conditions of the Gold Coast people. Another crisis took place during the 1937-38 cocoa season. After a drop in cocoa price on the world market, the Gold Coast farmers, middlemen, and chiefs had joined together in a large movement of protest against the monopoly of the large British firms which were engaged in West African Cocoa trade – like the United Africa Company (U.A.C.); Cadbury Brothers Limited (Cadburys); and John Holt and Company, Liverpool (Holts) – and accused them of being at the origin of the price collapse. The Africans refused to sell their cocoa crop to these expatriate firms (which were thought to plan for a

manipulation of producer prices) and boycotted European goods. The crisis had resulted in important losses for the European firms and the African traders.

With the mistakes of WWI and the 1937-38 experience still fresh in mind, the British government undertook then some economic measures to stabilize the Gold Coast's conditions during wartime. In the autumn of 1939, a cocoa control board under the Ministry of Food was established in London with the objective of buying the Colony's entire produce of cocoa for all the duration of the war at a fixed price that would be announced at the beginning of each season (Bourret, 150: 1960). Commercial firms in the Gold Coast, most important among which was the U.A.C. formed in 1929, were to act as licensed buying agents. The latter were to buy the cocoa at the different trading centers in the Gold Coast, then transport it to the ports after grading and bagging it to be sold to overseas buyers by the control board. These buying agents were also allocated quotas which were determined by their shipments during the previous seasons. Accordingly, large firms (like the U.A.C. which dominated West African trade) were designated as 'A' shippers while smaller agents, generally African merchants, were recognized as 'B' shippers (Alence, 403-404: 2001).<sup>6</sup> The 'A' buyers were all expatriates, consisting of almost all British firms engaged in the export of West African cocoa and which had entered into a market-sharing Agreement or 'Pool' in 1937, in addition to the English and Scottish wholesale Co-Operative Society and a Greek trader known as A. G. Leventis (Meredith, 291: 1988).

The Gold Coasters' reaction to this state-controlled cocoa marketing and quota system scheme was ambivalent. On the one hand, the cocoa farmers were relieved to have a guaranteed buyer for their produce so that they remained safe of the world market fluctuations and wartime dislocations, but at the same time they considered the control price (nine shillings) per load (sixty pounds) as too low to cover the costs of production. On the other hand, the African merchants considered the quota system as a flagrant attempt to maintain the dominance of British firms over trade in the Gold Coast (Alence, 404-405: 2001). To these complaints the Colonial Office replied that the quota system allowed the 'B' shippers to continue to exist, and that without it the 'Pool' firms would eliminate them from the cocoa trade altogether. Accordingly, the 'Pool' firms' power succeeded to exert enough pressure on the British government to make the marketing scheme permanent despite the African merchants' protests. In 1940 the control board was transferred from the Ministry of Food to the Colonial Office which established a West African Cocoa Control Board (W.A.C.C.B.), henceforth

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<sup>6</sup> According to this quota system, 'A' shippers were entitled to buy 88.2 per cent of the cocoa crop, whereas the 'B' (African) shippers were to buy only 11.8 per cent of the crop. Such a huge disparity would bring about much protest on the part of African merchants. See Bourret (150: 1960).

responsible for the purchase of West African crop, with a permanent secretary to reside in one of the British West African colonies to be closer to local conditions (Bourret, 151: 1960; Meredith, 293: 1988).

Political pressure on the British colonial government continued unabated from the African ‘B’ shippers who eventually succeeded to extract some concessions from the U.A.C. The latter agreed to increase the ‘B’ shippers’ share for the 1940-41 season. Nevertheless, African shippers were still unable to compete with the ‘A’ group and were regarded as troublemakers and a nuisance both by the Colonial Office and the British business community, who wished to completely eliminate them from trade (Meredith, 293-94: 1988). Such hostile attitude and uneven competition led most ‘B’ shippers to sell their cocoa to ‘A’ firms instead of exporting directly. In fact, the W.A.C.C.B. became so successful by 1942 that the scope of its activities was widened to include other export materials such as manganese, bauxite, timber, and rubber; and its name was accordingly changed to become the West African Produce Control Board (W.A.P.C.B.). In that year, the W.A.P.C.B. decided that the ‘B’ buyers were to sell their cocoa only to the ‘A’ shippers on the coast, a decision that transformed the African traders to simple buying agents for the U.A.C. which handled almost all the cocoa trade of the Gold Coast by the beginning of the 1942-43 season. “*Finally,*” Meredith wrote, “*having lost in an unequal struggle with the expatriate firms and the Colonial Office between 1937 and 1944, African international shippers of cocoa were permanently excluded*” (300: 1988).

Designed at the beginning as a wartime measure to shield the Gold Coast economy from price fluctuations in the world market that were expected during the war period and secure political peace and stability in the colony, the cocoa control scheme became a means of maintaining – and even consolidating – the dominance of the large British trading firms during WWII. The British government guaranteed the availability of cocoa supplies at a very low cost, while it made important profits from cocoa transactions and accumulated foreign currency. However, during the application of the scheme, British officials, either in the Colonial Office or the colonial governments, held a negative and prejudiced attitude to African traders and farmers in the Gold Coast and affirmed that:

“... African middlemen and traders were... undesirable and should be discouraged; that African farmers were ignorant, unintelligent and incapable of running their own affairs; that cocoa co-operative societies – created and organized by British district officers – were more ‘natural’ units of production and marketing than African

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capitalist enterprise; and finally that West Africans should not be allowed to manage the local marketing boards themselves.” (Meredith, 298: 1988)

Such actions and attitudes reflected a typically colonialist policy that aimed at the exploitation of the colonized, regardless of (or at best giving a secondary consideration to) the development of the natives’ economic enterprise. As a result, the Gold Coast merchants and farmers felt frustrated most of the time and were irritated by the colonial authorities’ commercial measures which led to their gradual exclusion from the marketing process. They therefore lost any hope of expanding their own business during the war years.

Though cocoa represented the predominant export crop upon which the Gold Coast economy mostly relied, it was not the only produce supplied by the colony. When the Resident Minister, Lord Swinton, settled in the Gold Coast in 1942 and established the West African War Council, he appealed for greater efforts to increase the production of raw materials to meet the needs of the war. Many industries which did not exist or were small in scale in the pre-war period saw an important development during WWII. For example, the production of manganese was increased; bauxite deposits began to be exploited after the establishment of railway transport; the timber industry was quickly built up; and so were the rubber, palm oil, and copra industries (Bourret, 153: 1960).

In parallel with these efforts, the British authorities launched an extensive program to curtail imports and achieve the colony’s self-sufficiency in food supplies, clothing, household goods, and building materials. This policy was dictated by the shortage of shipping space, most of which was devoted to the war effort. Farmers were encouraged to diversify their agricultural produce other than cocoa, to raise cattle, and keep poultry in order to meet the needs of the ever-increasing population of the Gold Coast, especially with the presence of great numbers of Allied soldiers and personnel in urban areas like Takoradi and Accra. Moreover, industries concerned with building materials were also taken into consideration, and several brick and tile factories were established (Bourret, 153-54: 1960). As a result of these intensive activities, the Gold Coast economic life was greatly stimulated during WWII, and the colony’s revenue rose considerably. However, the Gold Coast’s financial revivification did not benefit large proportions of the population.

In addition to its fears from fluctuations in the prices of the major products of the Gold Coast during the war years and their consequences on the colony’s coffers, the British government was constantly worried about inflation that might affect political stability in the country. The Gold Coast depended on imports for

its consumer goods, and this made it vulnerable to supply disruptions because of the war. Furthermore, Britain's imperial economic policy was "... to prevent 'the wrong use of Colonial spending power on unnecessary consumption', and the UK government imposed strict controls on colonial imports of consumer goods" (Alence, 408: 2001). In line with this policy, the British imposed strict controls over the Gold Coast's imports during the war, and their volume was substantially reduced. These controls were even tightened as Britain's debt increased throughout the war years, a situation which gave birth to a flourishing black market controlled by middlemen who had access to scarce goods. Consequently, the increase of the Gold Coast population in the urban areas (especially with the presence of Allied forces) combined with the shortages of imported consumer goods led to sharp price rises and the deterioration of the purchasing power of the majority of the population (Bourret, 154: 1960). To remedy the situation, the British colonial authorities set up price controls in an attempt to keep the prices within acceptable limits in the large retail shops of the government supply department. This measure proved, however, to be inefficient in front of the great number of formal and informal middlemen between the government retail shops and the final consumer. The result was that "... the cost of living rose 50 to 75 per cent in some of the coastal areas and, to a lesser extent, throughout the Dependency" ((Bourret, 154: 1960).

During WWII, then, large sections of the Gold Coast population suffered from the scarcity of consumer goods and of the high prices of the few available ones. Those who could afford to purchase imported manufactured commodities and consumer goods, like producers and merchants, could not do so because of the British authorities' strict controls over imports, leading thus to a shortage of the desired products. These frustrations created a favorable atmosphere for nationalist ideas and actions to ferment. As they played a crucial role by the side of their colonizer during the war, the Gold Coast people expected great changes in their favor to happen after its end. WWII had widened the political outlook of large portions of the Gold Coasters and ignited their desire for self-determination and democratic self-government, as promulgated both in the Atlantic Charter and the covenant of the newly-established United Nations. The post-war period was, therefore, a significant episode in the history of the Gold Coast, for it was during this period that outstanding political progress was achieved through the activities of a group of radical nationalists who were determined to challenge the authority of the British colonial administration.

## **II- The Growth of Political Protest in the Gold Coast after WWII**

During WWII, the British colonial authorities' policy was directed towards an economic, social, and political advancement of the Gold Coast, especially after the appointment of Sir Alan Burns as governor in 1941. His predecessor Sir Arnold Weinholt Hodson had given priority to war expenses and believed that development plans should be delayed until the end of the war (Bourret, 151: 1960). However, as soon as Burns arrived to the Gold Coast, he made a tour of the country to evaluate its most pressing needs. He concluded that development projects should not be postponed until the restoration of peace, and that the colony's most urgent requirements should be immediately considered. He, therefore, drew up a five-year development plan (1942-1947) which represented an important beginning though it was not completely fulfilled because of the war disruptions and lack of staff (Gocking, 79: 2005). Nevertheless, one of the most important measures taken by Burns was the appointment in 1942 of the first two African members of the Gold Coast Executive Council which had hitherto been composed exclusively of British officials (Padmore, 58-59: 1953). The next year, two other Africans made their entry to senior posts in the civil service after their appointment as assistant district commissioners, positions which had also been held only by Europeans before.

### **1- Wind of Political Change**

Despite the important steps made by the British colonial authorities for the political and economic advancement of the Gold Coast, the nationalist leaders were no longer content with piecemeal reforms and pressed for a rapid change in policy towards self-government. The events and experiences of WWII had occasioned deep changes in world politics and reshaped international relations. Colonial powers' traditional vision of their dependencies as mere sources of raw materials and wealth started to change, and so did the colonial peoples' attitude to their colonizers. With regard to the Gold Coast, the war had constituted a turning-point in its history, for it had brought about the political awakening of the people, opened up their perspectives on the outside world, and made them sensitive to certain injustices. Great hopes for a better future were raised by the favorable economic situation of the Gold Coast, and by the promises of the great powers to respect people's liberties and political choice, through the Atlantic and the United Nations Charters. With such an increasing concern of the international opinion with the colonial peoples' conditions, the Gold Coasters thought that the days of the British presence in their country were numbered, and that taking their own country's affairs into charge was but a question of time.

The Gold Coasters had already been deeply disappointed during WWII when Winston Churchill made it clear that the Atlantic Charter, especially the third point which had had an electrifying effect on colonial peoples in general, was in

fact intended for those Europeans who had been aggressed by Nazi Germany and not for the colonial peoples. Churchill pointed out that

“The Joint Declaration [the Atlantic Charter] does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government in India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire.” (Qtd. by Geiss, 366: 1974)

The Gold Coasters had, therefore, been denied the principles of democracy and national sovereignty, and their hopes had been dissipated by Churchill's strong opposition to extend the principles of the Atlantic Charter to the British colonies.

The most significant consequence of WWII was the shift in the balance of power from Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union. The two most important traditional colonial powers, Britain and France, exhausted their resources in the war and this affected their respective positions in the world. Melvin Goldberg stated that: “*The [Second World] war seriously weakened the economies of France and Britain ..., and the colonies in the eyes of France and Britain now assumed greater rather than lesser importance, not least in easing their balance-of-payments crises*” (667: 1986). The two world greatest imperialist powers were reduced to the second rank of world powers and became, therefore, subject to pressure both from the United States and the Soviet Union, who dominated the U.N., in order to grant their colonial subjects independence. The new world superpowers' attitude vis-à-vis colonialism, the internal pressure groups both in France and Britain advocating the colonies' independence, and the direct involvement of African soldiers in the fighting favored the rise of a more explicit form of African nationalism in the Gold Coast. The young nationalists organized political parties modelled on European ones and appealed to the masses for support.

By the end of WWII, the Gold Coasters' hope for the materialization of their aspirations was revived after the foundation of the U.N. in 1945 to replace the League of Nations. Indeed, the U.N. Charter included a chapter which guaranteed, *inter alia*, the colonial peoples' rights to self-government and advancement. This remarkable change in world politics reflected the profound effect of WWII on humanity. Concepts as freedom, justice, and security became the most precious values for the world population, and there sprang a worldwide tendency towards a rejection of colonialism as an unfair ideology which had



caused so much wrong to the weaker peoples in different parts of the world. Not only did the war undermine the power of the world's greatest imperialist nations, namely France and Britain, but it also "... *brought into question the moral right of one nation to rule over another*" (Goldberg, 663: 1986). The Gold Coast nationalist movement was now ready to take full advantage of such developments to move a step forward in the direction of self-government.

When the war ended, the Gold Coast ex-servicemen had expected a positive change in the British colonial policy because they had fought by the side of British soldiers and even helped liberate former British dependencies in Asia, like Burma. Those acts of loyalty and support during such critical moments of Britain's history would undoubtedly be rewarded by the end of WWII, the ex-servicemen thought. They felt, however, deeply frustrated by the British indifference to their hopes and aspirations during the post-war years. Adrienne Israel wrote

"After the war ended, the soldiers expected better jobs, as well as war bonus, gratuities, and pensions. On the whole, they were disappointed and disillusioned. Import shortages, inflated food and clothing prices, low wages, and unemployment wracked the Gold Coast economy." (Israel, 361: 1992)

For most of the G.C.R. soldiers, life after demobilization was not up to their expectations, and they came to believe that their participation in the war was worthless. As a result, in 1946 some politically engaged ex-servicemen revived the Gold Coast Ex-Servicemen's Union which had been formed in Accra in 1919, and which had functioned from 1920 to 1935, to voice their grievances and ask for more consideration of their demands (Israel, 361: 1992; Schleh, 210: 1968).

The Gold Coast farmers' conditions were not better, and the war years had been very difficult for them. The farmers felt exploited by the large British firms and European companies which dominated the export-import operations and which exported their produce, mainly cocoa, at low prices while the imported consumer goods were at exorbitant prices. In fact, the great damage incurred by European industry during the war made the availability of European-manufactured staples difficult for Europe itself, so overseas territories' needs were barely considered. In addition to these problems, cocoa producers had suffered great losses during and after the war because of a disease which had hit the cocoa trees during the 1920s, and which had been spreading in epidemic proportions ever since. The disease which destroyed the cocoa trees was caused by a virus known as the cocoa swollen-shoot virus (C.S.S.V.) carried by an insect, the mealy bug, and scientist were unable to eradicate it (Gocking, 81: 2005). Therefore, to

contain the epidemic the government put forward a program for the eradication of the C.S.S.V. through the cutting down and burning of the infected trees. Participation in this program was voluntary during wartime, but after the war it became obligatory as the harvests dropped considerably.

In 1946 the colonial government passed an ordinance which compelled the producers whose farms were affected by the C.S.S.V. to cut down the infected trees by themselves or by government-appointed cutting-out crews. The problem which resulted from the ordinance was that it came at a time when cocoa prices were significantly rising, and the farmers' opportunity to make up for the previous losses was now at stake. "*To most farmers,*" Gocking wrote: "*the cure seemed worse than the disease, since even affected cocoa trees could continue bearing fruit for at least two seasons*" (81: 2005). The irate cocoa farmers strongly opposed the ordinance even when the government offered compensation for the destroyed trees in 1947, as the cocoa prices continued their ascension. In this year, local state capitals of the cocoa-growing areas in the Gold Coast witnessed the organization of protest meetings by the farmers, many of whom were chiefs, which sometimes led to clashes with the cutting-out crews of the Department of Agriculture (Austin, 66: 1964). This atmosphere of discontent favored the growth of nationalist feelings and led to many farmers' espousal of nationalist protest for radical reforms by the side of the Gold Coast intelligentsia later on.

## **2- Foundation of the United Gold Coast Convention (1947)**

By the end of WWII, the Gold Coast had acquired a long experience of political protest which went back to the previous century, and the hardships engendered by the war convinced the nationalist leaders that the old methods of protest were no longer reliable. Sending petitions of protest to the colonial governors or delegations to the Colonial Office became outmoded practices and had proved to be ineffective on several occasions. There was now a need for rapid and radical constitutional reforms, so a change in nationalist strategies was, therefore, necessary. During the post-war years, a decisive role would be played by a generation of young political activists, among whom there was Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895-1965). The latter was a great wartime spirit and one of the most prominent Gold Coast leaders in the 1930s and 1940s. He had taken part in different Pan-African and nationalist activities in England and in his country before the outbreak of WWII. His rich political experience accumulated during the inter-war years which forged his personality and his royal ancestry of which he was proud (Twumasi, 73: 1978) qualified him to emerge as a resolute leader after WWII.

The Gold Coasters' aspirations for radical social, economic, and political reforms grew by the end of WWII, so the nationalists realized that self-government was a rather urgent priority. To mitigate the Gold Coasters' discontent and satisfy their claims for immediate reforms, Governor Alan Burns announced the introduction of a new constitution for the country in October 1944 but which did not come into force until March 1946 (Bourret, 163: 1960). The Burns Constitution gave the Gold Coast an African elected majority in the Legislative Council, a constitutional advance which was not made in any other place in colonial Africa up to then. The Legislative Council was now to constitute of thirty-one members, eighteen of whom were to be elected Africans. This was an unprecedented political progress for the Gold coasters which seemed in accordance with the requirements of the post-war spirit of democracy and respect of people's political aspirations as stipulated in the U.N. Charter. However, a close examination of the 1946 Constitution by the nationalist elite revealed serious loopholes with regard to responsible government. Actually, despite the African majority in the Legislative Council, the Burns Constitution did not give the Africans greater control over government policy. The senior government posts remained in the hands of British officers, and the Executive Council was still dominated by permanent members who were appointed by the Governor, and who were responsible to him and not to the Legislative Council. This meant that they could not be expected to change their advice on government policy in response to criticisms from the legislature (Ward, 324-25: 1958).

Politically-minded Gold Coasters were soon to turn against the Burns Constitution and express their dissatisfaction with it. The nationalists accused the new constitution of favoring the traditional authorities rather than the intelligentsia. The position of the chiefs was further entrenched, since out of the eighteen unofficial African members of the Legislative Council, thirteen were either chiefs themselves or elected by the native authorities. Moreover, these members were not expected to affect the balance of power or show any opposition, because "... *[they] were completely under the influence of the British political officers and as such invariably supported the policies laid down by the powers-that-be*" (Padmore, 96-97: 1953). Therefore, the Burns Constitution did not only widen the gap between the government and the nationalists but also between the native authorities and the intelligentsia. At this point, some nationalists thought it necessary to form a mass political organization to exert pressure on the colonial authorities for more political concessions to achieve self-government.

During the 1940s, J. B. Danquah was one of the most influential leaders in the Gold Coast political arena. He belonged to two classes of the Gold Coast which had often clashed: the traditional authorities and the intelligentsia. He,

therefore, knew better than any other leader the aspirations of each section and was able to handle this 'dual' personality with the skill of an insightful leader. When the Burns Constitution came into effect, he was among those who hailed it, and he was even nominated to become a member of the Legislative Council in 1946. As time went by, Danquah became more critical of the new constitution and denounced the anomalies it contained (Padmore, 60: 1953). His criticisms culminated in the foundation of a new political party, the United Gold Coast Convention (U.G.C.C.), at Saltpond on 4 August 1947 as a reaction to the British dilatory policy of piecemeal concessions. Danquah made it clear thus, right from the outset, that the objective of his nationalist party was to achieve self-government. The U.G.C.C. was, therefore, the first political organization in the Gold Coast to explicitly demand self-government as a necessary measure to the welfare of the country. A Working Committee established a few weeks after the foundation of the U.G.C.C. decided to launch a weekly organ, the *Star* (later the *Statesman*), and to employ a full-time secretary (Austin, 280: 1961), a position that would be held by the great nationalist leader Kwame Nkrumah who had recently come back home from London. Nkrumah's appointment as general secretary of the U.G.C.C. would greatly benefit the party with regard to securing the support of the masses, especially after the popular riots of February 1948 which started in Accra and spread to major towns of the Gold Coast, and which represented the real beginning of the decolonization process in this British West Africa colony.

## **Conclusion**

The outbreak of WWII created a need for Britain to recruit colonial troops and manpower to keep up her war effort, especially after the unprecedented ascension of Nazism and fascism in Europe. The strategic location of the Gold coast and its natural resources favored its direct involvement in the war by the side of the Allied Powers as it constituted a vital base for Allied operations, particularly when France surrendered to Nazi Germany in 1940 and lost its North African bases to the Axis Powers. Accordingly, it became necessary to found new military bases for the Allied in the Gold Coast and expand its regiment to protect the country and the other British West African colonies (surrounded by French colonies) against the Vichy regime French forces which collaborated with Nazi Germany. Moreover, the Gold Coast soldiers were deployed to fight by the side of Allied troops in Africa and in other parts of the world.

The involvement of the Gold Coasters in WWII, whether at home or elsewhere, had important political and economic impacts on this British West African colony. The Gold Coast servicemen fought with and against white people

and realized that the white man had also his weaknesses and was not always as powerful and civilized as they had been made to believe. In addition, while in Asia they got in touch with or learned about non-white peoples who either displayed high military and technological skills or profound political consciousness and nationalist feeling. All these contributed to shaping the Gold Coasters' political perspectives that would later play a remarkable role in the growth of nationalist consciousness in their own country.

Economically, WWII renewed Britain's interest in the Gold Coast raw materials and natural resources which required the establishment of new economic infrastructure, and the building and expansion of harbors and airfields. This engendered economic progress for the Gold Coast that benefited more the big British firms rather than the small native entrepreneurs who could no longer compete for important market shares in different fields. Moreover, WWII caused shortages in supplies of the main consumer goods, most of which were imported, leading to a parallel black market and sharp price rises. Consequently, the purchasing power of most of the Gold Coast people deteriorated, thus causing great discontent among them. By the end of the war, Britain introduced some political reforms through the introduction of a new constitution (the Burns Constitution) in 1946 in an attempt to assuage the Gold Coasters' wrath.

The most important reform was the election of an African majority to the Legislative Council for the first time in the history of this British colony. However, after close scrutiny of the Burns Constitution, the Gold Coast nationalists strongly opposed it and considered it as a measure to prolong British colonial rule in the Gold Coast, an act that went against their hopes. As a reaction, they decided to form a political party (the U.G.C.C.) in 1947 to voice their political demands, mainly the achievement of self-government. With the foundation of the U.G.C.C. started a long tussle with the British colonial authorities to achieve self-government. This atmosphere of political tension would soon favor the emergence of new political parties and nationalist leaders whose struggle would eventually culminate in the termination of British colonial rule in the Gold Coast in 1957.

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