

# **Kwame Nkrumah: Africa's “Man of the Millennium”**

## **Prelude**

**Kwame Nkrumah** became an international symbol of freedom, as the leader of the first black African country to shake off the chains of colonial rule. In 2000, BBC Africa Service listeners voted him the African of the Millennium.

As midnight struck on March 5, 1957 and the Gold Coast became Ghana, Nkrumah declared:

***'We are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity. We again rededicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa; for our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.'***

Explaining his vision in his 1961 book, *I Speak of Freedom*, Nkrumah wrote:

***'Divided we are weak; united, Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world. I believe strongly and sincerely that with the deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, the innate respect for human lives, the intense humanity that is our heritage, the African race, united under one federal government, will emerge not as just another world bloc to flaunt its wealth and strength, but as a Great Power whose greatness is indestructible because it is built not on fear, envy and suspicion, nor won at the expense of others, but founded on hope, trust, friendship and directed to the good of all mankind.'***

However, few of the newly independent African countries were persuaded of the need to give up some of the power they had recently won, to a central parliament for the continent. Ghana was one of 30 nations that founded the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. But Nkrumah regarded it as inadequate as it was not the United States of Africa he longed for.

But over the next few years, Nkrumah was increasingly regarded as an authoritarian and remote leader. In 1964 he declared himself president for life and banned opposition parties. Justifying his actions he wrote:

***'Even a system based on a democratic constitution may need backing up in the period following independence by emergency measures of a totalitarian kind.'***

Many Ghanaians celebrated when their former hero was overthrown by the police and military, while he was on a visit to China in 1966. There was little response to Nkrumah's broadcasts calling for the nation to rise against the coup leaders. He died in exile in Romania in 1972.

## **NKRUMAH'S LEGACY:**

### ***Economic Philosophy: Industrialization.***

*Nkrumah* believed that it was only through industrialization, not agriculture, that Ghana and the rest of independent Africa could catch up with the developed nations of the world. *Rural development was thus neglected.*

### ***Political:***

1. He began the move to dismantle colonial rule in Africa.
2. He advocated Pan-Africanism, to fight neo-colonialism on the continent.
3. He was the architect of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).
4. He became a symbol of hope and emancipation for Blacks and all oppressed peoples everywhere in the world.

### ***Economic:***

1. He built factories and industries in Ghana, the Tema City Harbor, new roads, and expanded the Civil Service.
2. He constructed the Akosombo Dam to provide electricity both for Ghana and the neighboring states.
3. He broke the monopoly of the multinational corporations in the Ghanaian economy, through nationalization policies. He created more jobs in the economy and increased wages. He set up the main Ghana Shipping Line - the Black Star Line.

### ***Social:***

1. He built new hospitals and pipe-borne water
2. He encouraged and financed sports to introduce Ghana to the world.
3. Africans took charge of their own affairs and reclaimed their dignity in the world. However, social inequalities persisted in Ghana.

### ***Education:***

He maintained the colonial educational structures geared towards European degrees and values.

He introduced free basic education for all children in Ghana by abolishing school fees at this level.

He expanded education by building more schools to increase enrollments.

He built teacher colleges to train teachers for the schools.

He built several secondary schools (high schools).

1. He built three universities: The University of Ghana, Cape Coast University, and the University of Science & Technology.

## ***KWAME NKRUMAH: THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE***

*(10 December 1947 - 6 March 1957)*

The fog-filtered African sun on 10 December, 1947, witnessed Kwame Nkrumah's return to the Gold Coast, disembarking at Takoradi after an absence of 12 years. He found a country still very much under British colonial domination, but was soon aware that demand for major political change was fermenting just beneath the surface. Wallace Johnson's communist West

African Youth League had infiltrated from Nigeria in 1937 and had stirred the political pot throughout the Gold Coast.

Johnson's star waned when he was convicted of sedition and deported in 1938. However, he left behind the residue of discontent with colonialism and a growing but leaderless demand for self-rule. The colonial government moved quickly and decisively to suppress every contentious political movement. Chiefs who showed any inclination towards independence were quickly destooled. Anti-tax movements were rapidly suppressed. Suspect civil servants were sacked and, in some cases, detained. Any challenge to British rule was abruptly terminated.

It was into this period of suppression that Kwame Nkrumah arrived home. Within days, he returned to his home at Nkroful for a brief family reunion. Word spread quickly that Nkrumah was home and after a fortnight, he began a series of speaking engagements and meetings in order to sense the level of unrest that lay just beneath the surface throughout the country.

A series of meetings with the leadership of the United Gold Coast Convention, (UGCC), founded on 4 August, 1947, and led by Dr. J. B. Danquah, resulted, on 20 January, 1948, in the appointment of Nkrumah as General Secretary of the Party. From that moment at Saltpond, the die was cast. The Gold Coast had its' leader and was on a fixed and determined course towards independence from Great Britain.

Nkrumah began an intense speaking tour throughout the country, and with his unique, impassioned rhetoric, soon had the entire country seething with Pan-African enthusiasm and demands for self-rule. Boycotts of European goods were initiated, labor strikes became common place and work slowdowns began in all areas of the Gold Coast's commerce and industry.

The 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 1948, was a landmark day in the nation's history. A large contingent of former servicemen who were tired of unfulfilled promises by the government, drafted a petition seeking redress of grievances for presentation to H.M's Governor, Sir Gerald Creasy. As they marched, unarmed and defenseless, they were set upon by government troops at Christianborg cross-roads. When the smoke cleared, sixty-three former loyal soldiers lay dead or badly wounded on the streets of Accra. Gold Coast would never be the same. Rioting and looting lasted for five days.

On 1 March, 1948, the Riot Act was read and Governor Creasy declared a state of emergency. Strict press censorship was imposed over the entire country. On 12 March, the Governor issued Removal Orders and police were dispatched to pick up and arrest the entire UGCC Central Executive. Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Danquah, E. Akufo Addo, William Ofori Atta, E. Obesebi Lamptey and E. Ako Adjei were arrested, detained and exiled to the Northern Territories.

On 14 March, 1948, Cape Coast students demonstrated, demanding the release of the Party leadership. Once again, the government responded with great force, leaving the dead and dying in its wake.

Meanwhile, the Colonial Office in London, greatly upset by events in the Gold Coast, appointed a Commission, chaired by Mr. A. K. Watson, Recorder of Bury St. Edmunds, with a mandate to investigate the reasons for the disturbances and to make recommendations for the continued governance of the colony. They began their in-country interviews and deliberations on 1 April, 1948.

With the country in chaos, Governor Creasy finally acceded to demands and on 12 April, 1948, the Party leadership was released from detention. On 19 April, he lifted the 1 ½ month press ban. These actions served to superficially quiet the country, but it did nothing to suppress the now flourishing and rampant demand for self-rule.

On 26 April, 1948, the Watson Commission concluded its deliberations and shortly thereafter, presented its report to H.M.G. The principal recommendation was that a Constitution be drafted as a possible prelude to eventual self-rule. To that end, an all African Constitutional Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of an esteemed African jurist, Mr. Justice Henley Coussey of the

Gold Coast High Court.

In the meantime, Nkrumah toured the country addressing huge crowds of every persuasion, every tribe, every religion and every class of society. "Self Government Now" echoed throughout the land. The strength of the three words grew at each speaking venue until it became the heartbeat of the country. With adult public opinion rapidly falling into line, Nkrumah next moved to mobilize the youth of the Gold Coast. On 26 February, 1949, he announced the formation of the Committee on Youth Organization (CYO) designed to bring young people actively into the political fray.

At the UGCC Easter Convention at Saltpond, Nkrumah rebuked the membership claiming that they were not working hard enough, that they did not fully understand and support his vision of self-rule. In a highly tense and acrimonious exchange, Nkrumah tendered his resignation as General Secretary of the party. On 12 June, 1949, at a CYO rally in Accra, Nkrumah announced the formation of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), calling for political unity and a nationwide unified demand for self-rule. "If the Cousey Committee does not find for self-rule now, we will shut this country down, we will strike, strike, strike!"

On 7 November, 1949, the Cousey Committee Report was published. Contained therein, were a number of mechanisms for inclusion of Africans in government, but it stopped short of advocating or even suggesting self-rule.

While the Cousey report was comprehensive and generally accepted by political moderates, Nkrumah was furious because of its self-rule shortcomings. He announced formation of the Ghana Representative Council (GRC) as the principal body to initiate appeal against the report. Plans were announced for a nationwide Positive Action strike to begin 1 January, 1950. He renewed his nationwide tour, calling on "all men of goodwill, organize, organize, organize. We prefer self-government in danger, to servitude in tranquillity. Forward ever, backward never". The chant "Self-government now" was taken up in every corner of the country.

New Years Day, 1950, dawned with labor shutdowns in every industrial and commercial facility. Government responded immediately with a State of Emergency announced by the Governor. Flying squads of the Gold Coast Constabulary swooped down and arrested more than 200 CPP and CYO leaders, including Nkrumah.

Arrests and detentions did not stop the movement. Enough people stepped into the leadership void to perpetuate the movement. The "Gold Coast Leader" was initiated, first as a sub-rosa broadsheet and within a month, as a widely distributed CPP propaganda newspaper.

In the meantime, the government accepted the Cousey Committee report and began implementing its recommendations, beginning with municipal elections in Accra on 8 April, 1950, Cape Coast on 12 June, 1950 and Kumasi on 4 November, 1950. CPP won in a landslide, to the shock and chagrin of H. M. G. Although still in prison, Nkrumah recorded an extraordinary plurality of 22,780 votes out of 23,122 votes cast.

On 19 February, 1951, the new Governor, Sir Noble Arden-Clarke, signed the Bill of Release freeing Nkrumah and others from prison after 13 months of detention. An invitation to State House on the day of his release resulted in Nkrumah being asked to form a government and become Leader of Government Business in the first African dominated government of the Gold Coast and the National Assembly. Nkrumah accepted, but he warned the Governor that he considered the Cousey generated Constitution to be "bogus, fraudulent and unacceptable, as it does not fully meet the aspirations of the people of the Gold Coast". He added that he would not rest "until full self-government within the Commonwealth was achieved". With that statement, he announced his first cabinet of 4 Europeans and 7 Africans. The die was now cast. The sun would soon rise on a new nation, Ghana.

For the next year, Nkrumah focused his effort on the development of an equitable constitution and creation of massive nationwide self-help schemes. Work was begun on the enormous Volta River

hydroelectric project and others of national importance.

On 5 March, 1952, Nkrumah was made Prime Minister. Work continued on a new Constitution. The country's first Five Year Development Plan was published and through its implementation, 9 Teacher Training Colleges, 18 Secondary Schools and 31 Primary and Middle schools were built. In the Northern Territories, 10 new hospitals were built. Major roads were constructed linking Accra and Cape Coast and Kumasi and from Tamale to Bolgatanga.

Nkrumah stepped up his pressure for negotiations for full Independence. Finally on 18 September, 1956, the Secretary of State for the Colonies announced a firm date for Gold Coast Independence, 6 March, 1957. On 12 November, 1956, a new Constitution was approved along with the nation's renewed name, Ghana, after the ancient traditional Ghana Empire, the oldest known state of West Africa, which flourished from the third to the seventeenth century.

On the appointed day, 6 March, 1957, the new nation was born. At midnight at Accra's Polo Grounds, Prime Minister Nkrumah announced that "the long battle is over and our beloved country Ghana is free forever". Always the Pan-Africanist, mindful of the rest of Africa, he said: "We again re-dedicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa, for our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.

## **KWAME NKROMAH: *HIS RISE AND FALL***

*(7 March 1957 - 24 February 1966)*

The political wave that swept Kwame Nkrumah into office as Prime Minister of Ghana was a true expression of her population. The nation was enjoying prosperity; foreign and domestic reserves were healthy; cocoa prices were excellent and stable and, in general, the prospects for the country's future were outstanding.

Nkrumah's government immediately embarked upon a very costly nationwide infrastructure improvement scheme. Roads were built and/or improved, in most cases, to all weather standards. The Accra to Tema Motorway was built to near Autobahn proportions. Medical services were greatly improved and expanded. Positive steps were taken towards implementation of the vast and extraordinarily costly Volta River hydro-electric dam at Akosombo. Tema township and world class harbor were built.

Nkrumah focused enormous resources on improving Ghana's export agricultural base which, traditionally, was heavily dependent upon cocoa. The Agricultural Development Board was established to regulate cocoa production, purchasing and marketing and to identify, subsidize and promote the production of other cash crops to alleviate the tenuous cocoa dependency.

The Industrial Development Corporation was formed to plan and undertake a full range of industrial projects. The Management Development and Productivity Institute was chartered along with its principal division, The Ghanaian Business Bureau, designed to develop and nurture small to medium size Ghanaian-owned businesses.

Government was determined to reduce Ghana's dependence on foreign manufacturers and bring an end to the nations' vulnerable position as a supplier of raw materials.

When Nkrumah took office as Prime Minister on 6 March, 1957, there was every indication that the above very noble activities could be successfully undertaken on a sustained basis. Cocoa prices were stable and at a near high, providing a steady and seemingly reliable source of foreign exchange.

In addition, and most importantly, Ghana was united behind her leader, succumbing to his extraordinary oratory, glib rhetoric and zeal. There was a vibrant national passion for development and self-reliance. Throughout the nation, in every region, in every Chiefdom, the population was enthusiastically and earnestly engaged in Nkrumah sponsored and supported self-help schemes; building schools, clinics, village and town centers, roads, drains and

irrigation systems. Ghana of 1957-1959 experienced a massive outpouring of productive energy and was being keenly observed by the international community as the development model for emerging African nations.

So what went wrong? How and why did the brilliant, charismatic Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the outspoken Marxist/Communist, Pan-African Founding Father of Ghana, begin his political slide and ultimate ignominious fall from power?

The list of reasons is lengthy and complex but it is safe to say, that Nkrumah's decline began in early 1960. Until then, the population, because he had lead them to Independence from Britain, was generally willing to overlook Nkrumah's Marxist/Communist ideological pronouncements, his costly demands for pomp and splendor and his assumption of more and more power, in many cases, usurping elected and Traditional Authority.

However, beginning in mid-1960, at about the time that he assumed the Presidency and approved the new Republican Constitution, the economic fallibility of Ghana clearly manifested itself and materially effected the lives of all Ghanaians. From 1960 to 1965, world cocoa prices plummeted, and the enormous development spending begun by Nkrumah four years earlier, severely impacted the country's economy. Foreign exchange and government's reserves shrank and disappeared. Unemployment rose dramatically. Food prices skyrocketed up over 250% from 1957 levels and up a phenomenal 66% in 1965. Eventually, there were massive food and essentials shortages effecting every area, sector and individual in Ghana. Economic growth, which had ranged from 9% to 12% per annum until 1960, dropped to 2% to 3%, insufficient to sustain a population expanding at almost 3% per year.

Nkrumah's response was an austere socialist budget which imposed flawed Marxist concepts of economic resuscitation on the population, primarily through harsh and unrealistic taxation. Financial mismanagement and economic chaos increased and the country was eventually poised at the brink of national bankruptcy and international disgrace.

In the meantime, to shore up his eroding political strength, Nkrumah assumed more and more power which he exercised capriciously. Obsessed with personal safety after two failed assassination attempts, he established a very well and heavily armed Secret Security Service and Presidential Guard recruited from abroad and under his direct control. Resentment by the ill-equipped Army and Police followed.

In 1964, Nkrumah declared himself President for Life and summarily banned all opposition political parties. His enemies, real and imagined, were detained. In the process, innocent people from all over Ghana were swept up and imprisoned in complete abuse of their individual rights and liberties. Laws were suspended and/or manipulated to prop up Nkrumah's faltering regime.

The power of traditional Chiefs was diminished and, in some cases, removed. This in a country where traditional authority through the great Akan chiefs had existed for a thousand years.

In the meantime, the Cult of Nkrumahism continued to develop and propound preposterous quasi-marxist theory and dogma hatched in the name of Nkrumah, at the Ideological Institute at Winebba. The Nkrumah cult, created by Nkrumah himself to perpetuate and mythicize himself, forced acquiescence by all, to what was called "the Nkrumahist Gospel".

To those of us who watched these events unfold during the years of Nkrumah's leadership, it was not a matter of if the bubble would burst, rather, when. On 21 February, 1966, President Kwame Nkrumah flew out of Accra bound for Hanoi, Democratic Republic of North Vietnam at the invitation of President Ho Chi Minh. Nkrumah was journeying to Hanoi prepared to offer his Vietnam War solution. Ghana was left in the control of a three-man Presidential Commission, consisting of a traditional Chief and two politicians.

On 24 February, 1966, the bubble did not merely burst, it exploded! In the early morning hours, Ghana's armed forces, with the cooperation of the National Police, took over government in "Operation Cold Chop", a well organized coup d'etat. The first announcement made from Radio Ghana said that the coup was led by Colonel Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade. Kotoka, an outstanding soldier, was a national hero, honored

for valor and bravery while serving as part of Ghana's United Nations 1960 and 1961 Congo contingent. A National Liberation Council was formed to run the affairs of state. Parliament was dissolved. Nkrumah's ruling political organization, the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.), was banned and Nkrumah himself was dismissed as President of Ghana's First Republic. The reign of the Oseyefo, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was over.

The great Ghanaian statesman, scholar, lawyer, philosopher, author and patriot, Dr. J. B. Danquah, wrote that "The true role of leadership must be support of individual freedom and personal worth. Human beings, not things make a nation great. Kwame Nkrumah forgot that and condemned his nation to many years of political and economic agony".

Nkrumah was a very complicated man. The times were turbulent and unpredictable and his undertaking was of extraordinary complexity. His successes, his Pan-African enthusiasm, the political galvanization of a very diverse, multi-faceted society, the attainment of independence for Ghana and his early economic achievements have earned him an important place in history. His failures emphasize the extreme fragility of the developing world. It is a world with little or no tolerance for political, economic, social or natural shortcomings.

Nkrumah's serious shortcomings resulted in his political destruction and the near-devastation of a magnificent land and people