

## The Quest in the United Kingdom for African Unity, 1945-48<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article outlines the formation, ideology and activities of the West African National Secretariat (WANS), established in London in 1945-6 by Nkrumah and his colleagues, from both the English and French West African colonies. Their aim was unity, as the only hope of real independence was through unity of all ethnic groups and all social classes, not just the 'intelligentsia'. Outlined are WANS' activities, its work with other political groups/activists in the UK and France, and reports in Gold Coast and Nigerian newspapers, which were kept fully informed. Labelled a communist, Nkrumah was under surveillance by MI5 in the UK and on his return home in 1947. Was this the beginning of the Cold War in West Africa?

**Keywords:** African Unity, Nkrumah, 1945 Pan-African Conference, West African National Secretariat, *The New African*, Gold Coast 'riots', MI5.

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## La Quête au Royaume-Uni pour l'Union Africaine, 1945-48

Marika Sherwood

### Résumé

Cet article présente la formation, l'idéologie et les activités du West African National Secretariat [*Secrétariat National de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*] (WANS), établi à Londres entre les années 1945 et 1946 par Nkrumah et ses collègues issus des colonies anglophones et francophones en Afrique de l'Ouest dont le but était l'union, le seul espoir pour l'Indépendance réelle étant réalisable à travers l'union de tous les groupes ethniques et de toutes les classes sociales, et non pas seulement « l'intelligentsia ». Sont présentés dans cet article les activités

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to point out that (a) without funding for this research, I have not been able to access all the relevant newspapers; (b) newspapers are especially important as a source of information because the British government continues to withhold many of the files on the Secretariat, on Nkrumah and on his colleagues.

de WANS, ses opérations avec d'autres groupes/militants politiques au Royaume-Uni et en France, ainsi que les rapports dans les journaux au Gold Coast et au Nigeria qui étaient bien informés. Qualifié de communiste, Nkrumah était sous la surveillance de MI5 au Royaume-Uni et à son retour au pays en 1947. Ce fait marque-t-il le début de la Guerre Froide en Afrique de l'Ouest?

### **Introduction**

In Sherwood (1996) I note that Nkrumah was suffused with notions of African unity from very early in his life. While studying in the USA Francis (as he then called himself) Nkrumah had written to K.A.B. Jones-Quartey, then also studying in the USA, about the need for a 'West African Federation... It is our task to build, to unite and develop...' In an undated note, while still studying in the USA, Nkrumah wrote: '...I have always dreamed of a Union - the United States of West Africa under African hegemony'.<sup>2</sup>

### **The 1945 Pan-African Conference**

Nkrumah arrived in Britain from the USA in late May 1945, to enrol for PhD degree – but in fact, according to his *Autobiography*, he 'spent much time sitting in Padmore's small kitchen, 'discussing politics and political tactics'. So no time for a PhD! He also became very politically active, working not only with the West African Students Union (WASU), and then his own organisation, the West African National Secretariat (WANS), but also travelling around the UK addressing Black workers, and left-wing organisations for the Coloured Workers Association. He also contributed to conferences held by anti-colonial and left-wing organisations.<sup>3</sup>

Trinidad-born Padmore, once a very active communist in Moscow and Hamburg, moved to the UK after he resigned from the Communist Party in 1933. With activists such as C.L.R. James and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, he set up anti-colonial campaigning organisations, published newspapers and

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<sup>2</sup> Sherwood (1996). PRAAD, Accra: SC21/1/43, Nkrumah Papers: Nkrumah to Jones-Quartey in Brooklyn, New York, 1 July 1942; SC1/120: undated note. In SC21/1/125 there are some 'Notes for a proposed West African Independence League with a permanent Secretariat'.

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood (1996:163-4).

earned a living as an outspoken, very critical journalist writing for African, West Indian, African-American and left-wing British newspapers.<sup>4</sup>

Nkrumah joined and became very active in the highly political West African Students' Union shortly after his arrival; and served as its Vice-President for 1945-6.<sup>5</sup> He accepted George Padmore's offer of Regional Secretary of the Pan-African Federation, which Padmore et al. had set up in the 1930s.<sup>6,7</sup> 'We worked night and day in George's flat' reports Nkrumah, 'to organise the Pan-African Congress to be held in Manchester in October 1945'.<sup>8</sup> According to the Congress' report — *Colonial and Coloured Unity*, Nkrumah was also the Secretary of the Publicity Committee.<sup>9</sup>

At the Congress Nkrumah met many who were already, or became political activists on their return home: Ako Adjei, Joe Appiah, G. Ashie-Nikoi and J.C. deGraft-Johnson from the Gold Coast; Obafemi Awolowo, F.O.B. Blaize, H.O. Davies, A. Ogunsanya, Jaja Wachuku and Magnus Williams from Nigeria; Hastings K. Banda from Nyasaland, E. Garba-Jahumpa from Gambia; Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson from Sierra Leone. These men proved to be immensely important contacts in the years to come. There were no representatives from the French colonies in Africa. Mursi Saad El-Din attended as an 'observer' from Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On Padmore, see James, (2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Adi (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Letters in my files on Pan-African Federation letterhead are dated from 1936. On the earliest letterheads the vice-presidents are listed as 'Geo. E. Moore, Samuel R. Wood, Gold Coast; Johnstone Kenyatta, Kenya; Mohamed Said, Somaliland; J.J. Magade, South Africa'. The President is 'Robert Broadhurst, Sierra Leone'. On the 1945 letterhead, the President is Dr Peter Milliard; Treasurer, J.E. Taylor; General Secretary, T.R. Makonnen; Regional Administrator, K.O. Larbi; Regional Secretary, 'Kwaame' Nkrumah.

<sup>7</sup> Prior to WWII the Federation's 'officers' were mainly Africans; in 1945 they were replaced by West Indians, except for Nkrumah and another Gold Coaster, barrister K.O. Larbi, as Regional Administrator.

<sup>8</sup> According to Nkrumah (1957: 52) Padmore had seized the opportunity presented by the preliminary meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in London in February 1945 to call a meeting of the many colonials attending to discuss convening a Pan-African conference.

<sup>9</sup> This is reproduced in Adi & Sherwood (1995). The first-ever pan-African conference was held in London in 1900; see Sherwood (2010).

<sup>10</sup> El-Din (2001).

The resolutions passed addressed various forms of racial discrimination, forced labour, and called for trade union rights, and the granting of universal franchise in South Africa and in the colonies. The main resolutions were for the independence, or at least self-government, for all British, French and Italian colonies in Africa and the West Indies.<sup>11</sup> There were no resolutions pertaining specifically to African *unity*.

The Congress's 'Declaration to the Colonial People', which Nkrumah states he had drafted, stressed the importance of forming a united front in the struggle against colonialism. 'The struggle for political power...is the first step towards, and the necessary prerequisite, to complete social, economic and political emancipation.' Workers were told that their weapons were the 'strike and the boycott'; the intellectuals and professional classes had to form co-operatives, fight for trade union rights, freedom of the press and of assembly. The Declaration concluded with 'COLONIAL AND SUBJECT PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, UNITE!'.<sup>12</sup>

Nkrumah in his *Autobiography* argues that the reason the conference achieved so much was 'because for the first time the delegates were practical men and men of action... This Fifth Pan African Congress provided the outlet for African nationalism and brought about the awakening of African political consciousness.' (p.54)

He further argues in his *Africa Must Unite* that a definite programme of action was agreed upon. Basically, the programme centred round the demand for constitutional change, providing universal suffrage. The methods to be employed were based on the Gandhist technique of non-violent non-cooperation, in other words, the withholding of labour, civil disobedience and economic boycott.<sup>13</sup>

How important was the Congress? Ayodele Langley, one of the major historians of Pan-Africanism and nationalism, argues that 'in general the Manchester Congress was seen as the zenith of the Pan-African movement'. In 1966 Langley interviewed I.N Garba-Jahumpa, who had attended the Congress, and was then a member of the Gambia House of

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<sup>11</sup> The full resolutions are in Adi & Sherwood (1995:102-112). For a recent assessment of the importance of the Congress, see Hogsbjerg (2015/6).

<sup>12</sup> Nkrumah (1947-1962: 44); Adi & Sherwood (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Nkrumah (1963: 134-5).

Representatives: '1945 must be regarded as an important year as it witnessed the attainment of the greatest height of Pan-Africanism.... For West Africa it marked the revival of the idea of [West] African National Congress of the early 1920s'.<sup>14</sup>

### West African National Secretariat, London 1945-1948

This lack of focus on the need for *African unity*, and how to achieve it and also to achieve the aims of the Congress, became a serious concern for long-time political activists Ashie Nikoi<sup>15</sup> and Wallace-Johnson.<sup>16</sup> Another organisation needed to be formed. They discussed this with Kojo Botsio<sup>17</sup>, Bankole Awoonor-Renner<sup>18</sup> and Bankole Akpata.<sup>19</sup> On 14 December 1945

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<sup>14</sup> Langley (1973: 355-6).

<sup>15</sup> G. Ashie Nikoi was a founder member and executive secretary of the militant Farmers' Association in Ghana. On a mission to the British Government on behalf of the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protections Society, he was deputed to represent it at the Congress. Ashie Nikoi served on the committee of Nkrumah's CPP until 1952. On Ashie-Nikoi's relationship with Padmore and Nkrumah, see Asante (1971).

<sup>16</sup> ITA Wallace-Johnson (the name is not always hyphenated) was born in Sierra Leone, worked on the Lagos *Daily Times*, attended the International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers in Hamburg in 1930; he studied briefly in Moscow and then migrated to the Gold Coast, again working for newspapers. In 1936 with Bankole Awoonor-Renner he founded the West African Youth League, which aimed to 'unite the youth, defend constitutional rights and overthrow the power of chiefs and the government', (Agbodeka, (1972: 129-130). After a couple of years in the UK he returned to Sierra Leone where he was imprisoned by the British for the duration of WWII. He was back in the UK and worked again with Padmore to organise the 1945 Pan-African Congress. See Adebisi (2008: 74-81); Spitzer & Denzer (1973).

<sup>17</sup> A student in Oxford, Botsio returned to the Gold Coast the same time as Nkrumah, to take up the position of Vice-Principal of Akim Abuakwa State College. He became General Secretary of the CPP, the political party formed by Nkrumah. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly and went on to hold a number of ministerial positions.

<sup>18</sup> Awoonor-Renner had studied in the USA and the USSR. He became the president of the militant West African Youth League. In 1945 he was studying law in the UK. Renner had been 'espousing the creation of "one Federated West African State...strong, and independent free from feudalism" since 1937', (Asante (1973). For a while he was one of the leaders of the CPP; then left it to form the Muslim Association. On his early years, see Holger Weiss (2007) and Sherwood (2011).

<sup>19</sup> Akpata joined the British Communist Party in 1948; he served as assistant, then as full secretary to WANS. When it collapsed he accepted a scholarship offered by Academy of Social Science in Prague, possibly to read for a Master's, then PhD degrees. (Correspondence with Charles University in Prague and subsequently the Czech Embassy in London, February – December 1996.) He returned to Nigeria in 1953.

they formed the West African National Secretariat (WANS) in order to foster 'the spirit of unity and solidarity among West Africans'.<sup>20</sup> Nkrumah was elected General Secretary; Wallace-Johnson was Chairman. Koi Larbi, recalls Joe Appiah, 'offered a large part of his chambers, free of charge' for use by the Secretariat.<sup>21</sup> The-'mission' of WANS was to 'maintain, sustain and push forward the national struggle for West African National Unity and Absolute Independence'.<sup>22</sup>

As there had been no Francophone representatives at the Manchester Congress, Nkrumah went to Paris to discuss issues with political activists from the French colonies: Léopold Senghor (Senegal), Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast), Lamine Guéye (Senegal) and Sourous Apithy (Benin). All were African delegates to the French National Assembly. According to Nkrumah they 'planned, among other things, a movement for the Union of West African Socialist Republics'.<sup>23</sup>

In his memoirs Appiah, then WASU's Vice-President and very active politically, reports that

... early in 1947 I set off for Paris on a visit which was to be repeated from year to year. It was on these visits that I met with Senghor, Maitre Pinto, Dr Zinson (Benin), Apity (Benin), Lamine Gaye (Dakar) M.A. Diop (Senegal), Mohamed El-Masoud (Neo-Destour Party), Mohamed Bensalem Elkohen (Istiqlal Party) and Mohamed Aloui (Istiqlal Party Morocco) and many others who met at 20 Rue Serpente regularly for a meal of couscous and long political discussions.<sup>24</sup>

WANS published its aims and objectives in a pamphlet which highlighted the words 'West Africa is one country: peoples of West Africa unite!' The aims were to

- a) supply information...with a view to realising a West African Front for a United West African National Independence
- a. to educate the peoples, especially the working classes, in the imperialist countries concerning the problems of West Africa

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<sup>20</sup> See Sherwood (1996: chapter 9); Asante (1973); Adi (1998: 128-130) & (2000: 69-82).

<sup>21</sup> Appiah (1996: 167).

<sup>22</sup> From *New African*, vol. 1, no.1, March 1946, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> *Nkrumah*, (1957:57).

<sup>24</sup> Appiah (1996: 167-8).

- b. to foster a spirit of national unity and solidarity within West Africa for the purpose of combating the menace of artificial territorial division now in existence
- b) to engineer the formation of an All-West African National Congress.<sup>25</sup>

#### *WANS Publications*

To achieve their aim to spread information and ‘educate’ everyone, WANS managed to raise enough money to publish a monthly paper. In March 1946 the first issue of *The New African* appeared. With the motto ‘For Unity and Absolute Independence’, Nkrumah ‘preached through its editorial columns African unity and nationalism’.<sup>26</sup> Naturally WANS’ aims were reprinted and its activities were reported. The editorial in the May issue stated that WANS ‘shall launch the appeal for the formation of an All-West African National Congress’.

To ensure co-operation with Francophone activists, in each issue there was an article in French. For example, there was an article by Senghor, ‘Pour une renaissance Africaine’ in the May issue. Grossly in debt, WANS had to cease publishing its paper in July 1947.

The journal was advertised broadly. The responses were not all favourable: the editor of British journal *West Africa* argued that it is ‘misleading to refer to Africa as if it were a united country... misleading to refer even to any one quarter of Africa in this sense’. The editor was also against the ‘denouncing [of] the principle of indirect rule, which is simply the principle of local self-government’.<sup>27</sup>

WANS Press published Bankole Awoonor-Renner’s small booklet, *West African Soviet Union* in 1946. In his Preface he calls for

...Only a united and independent West Africa...could ensure security, happiness and prosperity for our unfortunate country... The masses must struggle increasingly for our vitally needed freedom...Help us in

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<sup>25</sup> There is a copy of the Aims and Objectives in PRAAD: SC21/2/84 Nkrumah Papers; and also in the NAACP Papers, Group II, box A4. There is a version in *New African*, 1/1 March 1946. The *West African Pilot* felt that WANS was ‘destined to fill a long-felt need’ (Editorial, 20/2/1946).

<sup>26</sup> Nkrumah (1957: 57). If we are to believe the reports of MI5, then ‘Gemini’, whose articles were on the front page of each *New African*, was George Padmore.

<sup>27</sup> *West Africa*, 23/2/1946, pp.147, 151. Cecil King of the Harmsworth family, which owned a vast number of newspapers, bought *West Africa* in 1946. King (1969: 147).

whatever small way you can to create a free, united, strong and independent West African Federated Nation and the whole of Africa will eventually be liberated from the iron heel of imperialism and merciless exploitation...

This is followed by ‘Sublime Thoughts’: quotations from political thinkers — Plato, Danton, Stalin, and many more. The following chapters are his letters and brief articles, published from 1937. The booklet ends with a quote from Karl Marx: ‘A nation that oppresses another cannot be free’.

In 1947 Nkrumah published a booklet, *Towards Colonial Freedom* — whether this was published by ‘WANS Press’ is impossible to discover as the only copy I have seen is a later reprint. Nkrumah analyses the effects of colonialism on Africa, and severely criticises British policies. He demands political and ‘democratic freedom’, ‘complete and unconditional independence’, and ‘social reconstruction’, which he defined as ‘freedom from poverty and economic exploitation’. He argues that

... unless there is a complete national unity of all the West African colonies it will be practically impossible for any one West African colony to throw off her foreign yoke... The West African colonies, must first unite and become a national entity... But how to achieve this? First and foremost, Organization of the Colonial Masses...of labour and of youth... prepare the agents of progress... have its own press... The goal of the national liberation movement is the realization of complete and unconditional independence and the building of a society of peoples in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, UNITE: The working men of all countries are behind you.<sup>28</sup>

#### *WANS’ Activities 1946*

On 1 February 1946 WANS held a conference in London. The resolutions stated that the United Nations should help ‘West Africans achieve independence now’; and called upon the UN

... to take such steps as will bring about the complete liquidation of the colonial system... The existing territorial divisions in Africa [are] politically, socially, economically and from the point of view of security,

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<sup>28</sup> Kwame Nkrumah (1962:33, 41-43).



inimical to the best interests of the African peoples... [T]he British government's state monopoly over raw materials...is an encroachment upon the economic liberties of the West African people.<sup>29</sup>

Nkrumah emphasised that 'in all matters pertaining to the destiny of West Africa, personal and tribal differences, opinions and shortcomings must not be allowed to hamper our struggle for...Unity... Only in unity and organisation can West Africans find strength'.

There was another meeting on 27 March, at which a resolution for 'immediate transmission to the United Nations Security Council' was adopted, and then forwarded to the UN. This expressed 'great dissatisfaction with the United Nations Organisation for excluding from direct representation millions of peoples of African and other parts of the colonial world', and appealed to the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council...to take such steps as may affect the speedy realisation of complete independence for the peoples of the colonies.<sup>30</sup>

The next conference was advertised in the July 1946 issue of *The New African*.<sup>31</sup>

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

**CONFERENCE OF WEST AFRICAN  
IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

From Friday, August 30<sup>th</sup> to Sunday,  
September 1<sup>st</sup>, a Conference will be held  
in Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London  
of all West African in Great Britain and  
Ireland

**It is the duty of ALL West Africans to attend**

<sup>29</sup> *New African*, 1/1, March 1946, p.5.

<sup>30</sup> *New African*, 1/3, May 1946, p.23.

<sup>31</sup> This is the last issue of *New African* of which I have a copy. Nkrumah records that the paper collapsed due to lack of funds, but does not give a date (Nkrumah (1957: 57).

As so many of the founders (Akpata, Adjei, Botsio, Nkrumah) of WANS were also WASU officials, the conference was organised jointly by the two organisations. The theme was 'Unity and Independence of all West Africa'.

It was attended by 200 to 300 West Africans, mainly students from universities [and] trade unionists, students and other representatives of the West African population of this country, claimed to number over 10,000 met to confer on the future of their home countries at a three day conference... Mr Wallace Johnson...took a leading part and representatives of French West Africa were present. [There was an] enthusiastic audience of two to three hundred, [including] two or three women and a small number of Europeans... With the exception of Nkrumah and Botsio all the members of the preparatory committee were from Nigeria.<sup>32</sup>

These 'French West Africans' were M. Benoit of Senegal (who deputised for Léopold Senghor) and Sourous Migan Apithy, then representing Dahomey in the French Assembly.<sup>33</sup> Apithy, who chaired one of the sessions, spoke about 'the unnatural frontiers separating Africans – all Africans should be united as one African community... The occupation of Africa by European powers is comparable to the occupation of France by Germany during the war.'

The conference 'approved the resolutions of the Manchester Congress and demanded immediate and absolute self-government'. 'Unity and independence are complementary concepts in the African struggle... A united, free and independent West Africa is the political condition for Africa's redemption and emancipation.' The resolutions called for the creation of a West African National Congress, to be formed of 'co-operative societies, trade unions, producers' unions, Bar and Medical Associations', to meet in West Africa 'towards the end of next year. It will call for a constitutional convention of the people of West Africa, formulate its own constitution with a programme of political action, aiming at a

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<sup>32</sup> *West Africa*, 14 September 1946, p.845; *New Leader*, 21/9/1946, p.2.

<sup>33</sup> Apithy attended the founding meeting of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) at Bamako, Mali, and was elected one of its vice presidents. Two years later he broke with the RDA and associated himself and his party, the Parti Républicain Dahoméen (PRD), with the socialist aims of Senegal's Léopold Senghor. Senghor 'preferred greater participation in the political process within the French Union to self-government'. (Esedebe (1982: 189) .

provisional constitutional government... Should have a socialist basis... The ultimate aim is of a United Socialist States of Africa... A common language should be found which all could speak in addition of their own tongues.' The Secretariat was to 'initiate territorial and local councils...to rally the masses of the West African people behind the Congress. The councils were to provide a centre for the movement for independence and unity. WANS was given the task to convene a conference in Africa within one year, preceded by a Paris meeting.'<sup>34</sup>

Reports of the conference and the resolutions were widely distributed, for example to *West Africa* in Britain and to the *West African Pilot* (20/9/1946, p.1) in Nigeria, which noted the absence of reports in the British daily papers except for the *Manchester Guardian*. There was also an appraisal, 'The West African Conference and After', by 'An Observer', published in the summer of 1947 issue *WASU Magazine*. The very supportive writer believed that 'a united and independent West Africa can, and will, act as a lever with which the entire African continent will be freed'. He also warned that 'there will be—traducers, obstructionists, confusionists, traitors, shirkers, self-seekers and quislings, but they must, and will be overcome...'

#### *WANS' Activities 1947*

Nkrumah returned to France, and met again with the African deputies to the French Assembly. They agreed to hold a West African National Conference in Lagos in October 1948, 'to which all political organisations and popular movements in the whole of African should be invited'. According to the MI5 report, Nkrumah was in Paris in September, and visited the 'headquarters' of the Communist Party (CP). There he had a 'long interview' with Raymond Barbé of the French CP's Central Committee and

'with other African members of the French African Deputies who were directing the RDA. We gather that the French Communists did not encourage Nkrumah in his proposal to create a Pan-West African

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<sup>34</sup> Compiled from *Comet*, 11/9/1946, p.1; *Manchester Guardian*, 2/9/1946, p.4; *New Leader*, 21/9/1946, p.2; *New Times & Ethiopian News*, 14/9/1946; *Socialist Leader*, 21/9/1946; *West Africa*, 14/9/1946, p.845 and 23/2/1946, p.151; *West African Pilot*, 20/9/1946, p.1; Smertin (1987: 62)

Federation... Looking too far ahead in view of the political backwardness of the West African Peoples.’<sup>35</sup>

Nkrumah states that he was made ‘responsible for the convening of this conference and the plans that I laid before them for carrying this out were immediately approved’.<sup>36</sup> On his return to London Nkrumah ‘set to work to set the wheels in motion. We held demonstrations and meetings in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park... We used to collect a crowd of people who were always sympathetic...’<sup>37</sup>

Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast in November 1947 in order to take up the position of general-secretary with the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), a new political party composed mainly of ‘intellectuals’. In his farewell speech in London he stated that in order to publicise WANS’ proposed Lagos Congress, he would stop in Freetown, and then Liberia, where he intended asking President Tubman if he would open the Congress. In Freetown, with the aid of Wallace-Johnson, still chairman of the radical West African Youth League, Nkrumah met with all the Sierra Leone political leaders and succeeded in obtaining a promise of co-operation for the formation of a ‘united front and work for African Unity’. President Tubman was not in Monrovia when Nkrumah’s ship docked, so he met with ‘several politicians’, from whom he got the impression that independent Liberia would be reluctant to participate in a conference ‘composed solely of representative from territories of colonial status’.<sup>38</sup>

Bankole Awoonor-Renner now took charge of WANS. In his ‘New Year message’ he asked for financial and moral support for the All West African National Congress. This would be a ‘meeting of West Africans, whose hearts are burning for the freedom of their countries... the oppressed and suffering

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<sup>35</sup> TNA: KV2/1848, ‘Nkrumah, Francis N K’, 92a, dated ‘31/3/49’. This is one of the recently released MI5 file on Nkrumah; some pages are withheld and some lines crossed out. It contains a biography of Nkrumah: from whom did the British secret service obtain information about Nkrumah’s years in the USA? From the CIA?

<sup>36</sup> Nkrumah (1957: 59); Smertin (198: 63).

<sup>37</sup> Nkrumah (1957: 60).

<sup>38</sup> Nkrumah, (1957: 64-65).

people of West Africa, upon whose shoulders the burden of imperialism has rested to long.<sup>39</sup>

In November 1947 African-American singer and civil rights activist Lena Horne addressed a WANS meeting attended by about '300 West Africans'. The resolutions passed demanded complete independence for the colonies and that the claims of the USSR for membership of the new Trusteeship Committee should be considered if the UN decided to establish Trusteeships for colonies.<sup>40</sup>

There was a 'Mass Meeting' convened by WANS on 24 December 1947. Resolutions to be sent to the United Nations were agreed: complete independence for all colonial peoples; the liberation of the former Italian colonies: the 'recognition' of Ethiopia's claim for the return of Eritrea and Somaliland; the inclusion of the Soviet Union by the UN in its Trusteeship Council. It was agreed that 'the continuation of the colonial system is a menace to world peace'.<sup>41</sup>

What is not mentioned in any of the reports I have found on WANS for this year is any indication of how its members responded to the granting of independence to India on 18 July, and the division between India and Pakistan a month later. Was this reported in the newspapers in Britain's other colonies?

#### *WANS' Activities 1948*

On 30 January 1948 WANS welcomed Ozuomba Mbadiwe, founder of the African Academy of Arts and Research in the USA, and showed his film, 'The Greater Tomorrow'. This was probably the first film made by an African. Mbadiwe appealed 'to all Africans and people of African descent in Britain to unite'.<sup>42</sup>

In the Gold Coast there was a boycott of shops for not reducing grossly increased prices. In February 1948 the Ex-Servicemen who had not received

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<sup>39</sup> *Ashanti Pioneer*, 8 November 1947, includes a photograph of Nkrumah (as does the *Gold Coast Observer*, 24/10/1947); *Pioneer*, 2 February 1948. *West African Pilot*, 13/1/1948, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Herald*, 20/11/1947, p.2; *Daily Mirror*, 22/11/1947, p.5; *Socialist Leader*, 6/12/1947, p.6; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14/12/1947, p.20; *West African Pilot*, 28/1/1948, p.1. Henceforth cited as *Pilot*)

<sup>41</sup> *Ashanti Pioneer*, 29/12/1947, p.1; *Pilot*, 13/1/1948, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ashanti Pioneer*, 9 March 1948, p.1.

the jobs, disability benefits, etc., that they had been promised, drew up a petition and received permission to hand it to the governor. The police monitored their march. At one junction, believing that the Ex-Servicemen were intending to deviate from the approved route, they shot at least two of them.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, this led to 'riots' all over the country, resulting in at least 27 deaths and hundreds of wounded people. Troops, including some 'imported' from Nigeria, were sent around the country, to 'keep the peace'. The government accused the UGCC of inciting the riots. All six UGCC leaders were imprisoned.<sup>44</sup> On 3 March 1948 WASU and WANS held a conference in London in response to the 'disorders' on the Gold Coast. The statement issued condemned the shootings and demanded self-government. They organised a mass rally at Trafalgar Square and other meetings, and handed in their protest to the Prime Minister's office.<sup>45</sup>

*WANS's work with other organisations and activists in the UK*

Nkrumah, not only representing WANS but also the Coloured Workers Association, visited Black organisations in Liverpool, Cardiff and Manchester.

In London, as already reported, WANS and WASU<sup>46</sup> often worked together. WASU had organised a public meeting in support of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) delegation which arrived in August 1947. Led by Nnamdi Azikiwe they were protesting against the new Constitution imposed by Governor Richards. WANS and WASU organised a demonstration on 14 September: 'thousands assembled in Russell Square for a procession to Trafalgar Square'.<sup>47</sup> George Padmore, who was the NCNC's press secretary during their visit, reports that

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<sup>43</sup> Austin (1976: 18); Killingray (1983: 523-534). The petition and the Colonial Secretary's response are in *West African Review*, April 1948, pp.376-378.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Hyam claims that 29 'had been killed' (2006: 146). That 29 had been killed is also stated by Edward Keeling, MP in the House of Commons on 24 September 1948 (*Hansard*: House of Commons, 24/9/1948, vol. 456, c. 1239). See reports in *Ashanti Pioneer*, 8/3/1948; *Pilot*, 19/3/1948; *Pilot*, 2/3/1948, p.1; *West Africa* (13 March 1948, p. 245) reported that 21 Africans had been killed and 228 wounded.

<sup>45</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune* 5/3/48. See also Adi (1998:137-139).

<sup>46</sup> On WASU, see Olusanya (1982) and Adi (1998).

<sup>47</sup> *West African Pilot*, 20/10/1947, pp.1, 2, 3; *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 29/11/1947; *Chicago Defender*, 2/8/1947, p.15 and 27/9/1947, p.15; *Manchester Guardian*, 2/8/1947,

while the Nigerian mission was in Britain, close links were established between the delegates and representatives of the West African National Secretariat... Dr Azikiwe endorsed the decisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress and the Secretariat to work for immediate self-government and the realization of a United West African Federation.<sup>48</sup>

In April 1946 Nkrumah was one of the speakers at the Fabian Colonial Bureau's Conference on the 'Relationship between Britain and the Colonial People'. According to historian Margery Perham's report, Nkrumah's last sentence 'Complete and absolute independence for West Africa is the only solution', evoked 'cries of hear hear and stamping'.<sup>49</sup> Nkrumah's speech is included in the report of the conference, *Dominion or Co-operation: the relationship between British and Colonial Peoples*.

WANS received considerable support from Fenner Brockway, editor of the *Socialist Leader* and a Member of Parliament at various times, who was an outspoken critic of imperialism. Immediately after the war, when activists no longer had to fear imprisonment for 'sedition', he revitalised the British Centre Against Imperialism (BCAI), which he had set up with French colleagues in 1937. It was supported by left-wing MPs and anti-colonial activists as well as 'Black' organisations — for example, the Pan-African Federation and WANS. Bankole Awoonor-Renner attended BCAI's first conference in February 1946.<sup>50</sup>

As he had received support from the Communist Party in the USA while he was president of the African Students Association there,<sup>51</sup> Nkrumah sought help and support from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The Party in the USA was very active regarding racial

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p.6 and 14/8/1947, p.6; *The Times*, 14/8/1947, p.3; Padmore (1956: 174-5) ; Adi (1998:136).

<sup>48</sup> Padmore, (1956: 175).

<sup>49</sup> *Fabian Quarterly*, June 1946; *Empire*, 9/1, May/June 1946. There is a copy of the report in Bodleian Library: Mss Br Emp s. 365, Fabian Colonial Bureau, 69/3, which also contains much correspondence; see also Ms Perham, Box 698/5, 'Clacton Conference'.

<sup>50</sup> There is very little information available on the BCAI; it was transformed into the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism in 1948. See Howe (1993: 176-183), Sherwood (2014: 57/1); *New Leader*, 2/2/1946, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> See Sherwood (2015). When I was researching for this article I found nothing relevant in the CPUSA files. Later I found a copy of a letter Nkrumah had written to Claudia Jones in 1942, thanking her for her support. Claudia was a senior official of the Party.

discrimination and had many African-American members, including senior officials. The Party in Britain was somewhat different: it ignored racial discriminations and colonial issues until after WWII. In February 1947 the Party held a six-day Empire Communist Conference, attended by 28 delegates from Parties in 11 countries; the only delegates from Africa were Daniel de Plessis (of European descent) and H.A. Naidoo (of Indian descent) from the South African Communist Party. Desmond Buckle<sup>52</sup> presented a 'special report on West Africa'. A joint declaration was issued, asserting that 'the democratic right of self-determination of all peoples is the cardinal principle of communist policy'.<sup>53</sup> In 1948 the Party's (new?) African Committee began to publish a monthly *Africa Newsletter*.

The CPGB's office was closely monitored by MI5. From the reports of telephone conversations we learn that Nkrumah sought help for secretarial work for WANS, and for advice on the content of its publications. He sent drafts for correction to the Party and visited to discuss these. If I interpret these reports correctly, then the Party might have helped with the cost of publications and postage to Africa. However, as the *New African's* fifth issue (July 1946) appears to have been its last, the financial assistance could not have been significant. Is it possible that the CPGB did not approve the contents of the journal and ceased any financial contributions?

### **Support in the Gold Coast and Nigeria**

Apart from contacting and obtaining some support from the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (ARPS), WANS rallied support through the newspapers.<sup>54</sup>

In a 'despatch' printed in the *Ashanti Pioneer* on 9 February 1946, Nkrumah stated that WANS was sponsored by the ARPS, the West Africa Youth League of Sierra Leone (Wallace Johnson), the Gold Coast Farmers' Committee (Ashie Nikoi) and the Sierra Leone Trades Union Congress.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Adi (2001: 22-46).

<sup>53</sup> Branson (1997: 145-148; there is a full report in CPGB, *We Speak of Freedom*, 1947.

<sup>54</sup> It is important to emphasise that I have not been able to access all relevant newspapers.

<sup>55</sup> Nkrumah's correspondence with the ARPS is at Cape Coast Archives: Acc78/64 ARPS Papers, vol. 1, no.5, correspondence February and March 1946. There is also some correspondence within Acc111/65 Sekyi Papers. These Papers contain copies of the *New African*.



After outlining WANS' aims Nkrumah 'recommended the new London Secretariat to the serious patronage of all progressive Africans in West Africa. Long live WANS!'

Nkrumah's report of the August 1946 conference was in the 14 February 1947 issue of the *Gold Coast Observer*. Nkrumah appealed for 'all organisations to form themselves into national councils' which would serve as the 'foundations for the All West African National Council'. The *Observer* on 24 May 1946 (p.3) printed Nkrumah's 'Greetings To The People Of West Africa'. 'Personal and tribal differences, opinions and shortcomings must not be allowed to hamper our struggle for West African National Unity', he advised. 'Only in Unity can West Africans find strength... The West African National Secretariat shall launch an appeal for the formation of an All-West African National Congress. PEOPLE OF WEST AFRICA UNITE!'

WANS garnered support from the Farmers' Committee of the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the Trade Union Congress of Sierra Leone and the West African Youth League there.<sup>56</sup>

On 6 September 1947 the *Gold Coast Observer* printed the invitation issued on behalf of WANS by Bankole Akpata for 'West Africans all over' to attend the forthcoming WANS conference. WANS advocated 'united and concerted action to act as a lever to free the entire continent of Africa'. On 12 November 1947 the *Ashanti Pioneer* printed a letter signed by the WANS Treasurer, outlining the 'framework' for the conference. All West African 'territories' were asked to send representatives 'democratically elected by member organisations'.

A letter from Kwame Nkrumah, 'Secretary-General', was printed in the *Ashanti Pioneer* on 6 June 1947. It was the 'dawn of a new era', Nkrumah stated, the 'era of West African Nationalism', which

... presupposes the emergence and struggle for a free, united, and independent West Africa, a federal union of all the territories in West Africa, under one central government of the people, for the people, by the people of West Africa. For without political power in the hands of the West African peoples themselves, no economic and social progress can be achieved under foreign control.

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<sup>56</sup> Esedebe (1982: 175).

The *Gold Coast Observer* (24/10/1947, p.306), in a very enthusiastic biography of Nkrumah, noted that Nkrumah was returning home, and argued that his

... next assignment [is] the forthcoming All West African National Congress... [It is] mainly his duty to prepare the spadework for that event which will be the great landmark in the annals of West Africa... He insists, in conversation that... 'Our paramount aim and object must be to unite our forces and free ourselves from imperialism. To establish a free, united and independent federation of West African States.'<sup>57</sup>

'Despatches' from WANS were printed quite frequently in all these papers. WANS' 'New Year message for 1948', signed by Bankole Awoonor-Renner, asked for financial and moral support for the All West African National Congress. This would be a 'meeting of West Africans, whose hearts are burning for the freedom of their countries... the oppressed and suffering people of West Africa, upon whose shoulders the burden of imperialism has rested too long.'<sup>58</sup> The editor of the *West African Pilot* was very supportive:

In the realms of politics, economics, education and other social services, there is certainly enough similarity...among the problems facing British West Africa as a whole – and enough fully to engage an All West African Congress in its primary task of tightening the strands of destiny that bind the West African peoples together. The impassioned appeal from London is, therefore, more than worthy of the spirited response of all West Africans.<sup>59</sup>

### **Nkrumah under surveillance**

Nkrumah and WANS were obviously seen as a huge threat by the colonial masters: if Africans did unite, maybe they *could* achieve independence. Could Africans then possibly become interested in *communist*, as opposed to *capitalist* policies? After all, almost immediately after the end of WWII, the 'Allies' (Britain, western Europe, the USSR and the USA) split and the USSR began to be seen as an enemy, wanting to impose its domination/policies everywhere. So WANS and its members *had* to be investigated, kept under

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<sup>57</sup> Nkrumah's expected return was also noted in the *Pioneer* on 8/11/1947, which also printed a photo of Nkrumah.

<sup>58</sup> *West African Pilot*, 13/1/1948, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> *West African Pilot*, 14/1/1948, p.2.

surveillance and somehow controlled. The fear of the planned conference, fear of African unity, became embedded in the British government's perception of the future.

There was a raid on WANS' office. Joe Appiah in his *Autobiography* relates that

One morning, Kwame went to the office as usual only to discover that all the files and drawers had been turned out...Nothing had been stolen.... We went and reported the matter to the police, who had their station only some ten yards away and almost opposite to our office building... The sergeant and two men and ourselves went...for an official inspection... The sergeant's only comment was, 'Curious, ain't it?,'<sup>60</sup>

The released MI5 files on Nkrumah begin with a file dated 31 December 1942. This is a copy of a request from the 'Security Division of British Security Co-ordination' in the USA, for information on 'Suspect Individual Nwia-Kosi Nkrumah', sought by the 'US 2<sup>nd</sup> Service Command'. The response is not in this file. The next page is from a police Special Branch report dated 10/10/45 on the Pan-African Federation. The third page, dated 17/6/1947, is the beginning of the reports on the Secretariat and Nkrumah.

These MI5 files reveal that Nkrumah was under surveillance by MI5 and the police's Special Branch. These and the recently released Colonial Office files reveal that all the information on Nkrumah was shared with government departments, the colonial governors and the police, and often internationally.<sup>61</sup> One has to ask: where are the reports from Nkrumah's arrival until June 1947? After all, if the Federation was under surveillance, the police and MI5 would have known of the arrival of Nkrumah and his association with Padmore and the Pan-African Federation.

Even Nkrumah's departure was under surveillance: the note in the MI5 files states that this 'is being covered at the ports by S.B.<sup>62</sup>, with the exception of the Port of Liverpool. Mr Irvine has asked if this one Port

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<sup>60</sup> Appiah (1996:167).

<sup>61</sup> The files I have seen for the 1940s are: TNA: FCO141/ 4933, 141/4984, 141 /4990, 141/141/5091 and 141/5162.

<sup>62</sup> 'SB' – police Special Branch dealing with 'security issues and intelligence'

could be covered by the Immigration Officer'.<sup>63</sup> Why it should not be the 'SB' in Liverpool that monitors Nkrumah's departure is a mystery. Could it be because the 'S.B.' was well known by Liverpool's Black community, some of whom might have been planning to bid farewell to Nkrumah?

### **The government's response**

#### *Co-operation with Belgium, France and the USA*

The news of the proposed conference reached the Belgium and France as the Foreign Office asked the Colonial Office to send information to the 'Belgian authorities' and also to France.<sup>64</sup> This led to the continuous exchange of information between the governments. For example, MI5 had discussed the holding of the WANS' proposed conference with its French counterpart: it 'believe[d] delegates from French and Belgian colonies had been invited... The Communist Party (CPGB) had promised aid', and had approached the Parties in France and Belgium 'to test their reactions to the proposal for a Pan West African Federation, the foundations for which the conference is intended to lay'. The French CP's response, reports MI5, was 'imperialist but Belgium was forthcoming'. The French asked if it was 'appropriate for this invitation to be accepted'.<sup>65</sup>

The British Colonial Office and France's Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer, exchanged information and discussed the Secretariat and the planned conference. This interesting comment was in the draft of a letter to Paris, but was crossed out:

I think, judging from the knowledge that we possess of the Secretariat and its promoters, it is very doubtful whether any official recognition would be given to the Conference, even though there was a possibility of the two Deputies from Senegal attending.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> TNA: KV2/1847, f.27c, 28/10/1947.

<sup>64</sup> TNA: CO537/3566, SECER to Governors 18/9/1948; Nigerian Governor to CO 3/11/1948; CO to Paul Henry, Paris, /11/1948.

<sup>65</sup> The CO replied to the French government that 'we do not consider that the proceedings of the conference should be accorded any official recognition' and sent info on WANS. TNA: CO537/3566, CO to MI5, 18/11/1947; MI5 to CO, 3/12/1947; letter from CO to P. Henry, Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer, Paris.

<sup>66</sup> TNA: CO537/3566, draft dated 17/12/1947.

Information also continued to be exchanged with the USA regarding Nkrumah.

*In Britain's colonies*

In a 'Secret despatch' Kenneth Bradley, Gold Coast Deputy Governor, sent information about the UGCC and Nkrumah to the Colonial Office. Nkrumah, he warned

... will seek support of certain communist organisations in the UK with which he seems to have been actively associated for some time past. He may be also expected to establish contact with communist groups in neighbouring French territories... He has also been attempting to enlist...the support of the British Communist Party for the West African National Congress, which is to be held in Lagos in 1948.<sup>67</sup>

What led the Commissioner of Police in Lagos to write to the Commissioners in the other colonies in August 1947, asking for information on the 'Communist agents who may be at work'?<sup>68</sup> Was it the diffusion of information on WANS and Nkrumah?

There was even more concern in 1948, after the 'riots' in the Gold Coast. Mr Cohen of the Colonial Office sent a Memorandum to all the Governors of the British West African colonies:

We shall have to decide...what our attitude should be towards the holding of the proposed Congress... will be influenced by findings of the Commission of Enquiry in Accra... Question the relationship between UGCC and WANS and WANS and the CPGB. Shall consult Major Kellar of MI5 now in West Africa. Do you have any definite views if action should be taken to prevent the Congress being held or whether there should be any interference.<sup>69</sup>

Major Kellar of MI5 set up MI5 branches in the West African colonies; their headquarters was in Accra. The colonial governors were requested to send fortnightly reports to London on 'communism'; regular 'intelligence'

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<sup>67</sup> TNA: CO537/3566, 'Secret despatch' from Kenneth Bradley, Deputy Governor, to CO, 12/12/1947.

<sup>68</sup> TNA: KV2/1848: Director General, 8/8/1947.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: CO537/3566, Cohen, from CO to all West African governors, SECRET, 19/4/1948. See also Tijani (2009).

reports were also now required. New, stringent 'sedition' laws were introduced and laws to control immigration. Newspaper editors in all the colonies were frequently jailed. The government published its own free news-sheet. The BBC received more funding, as did the British Council, to ensure that everyone could learn about the glories of the 'Mother Country' – and of capitalism.<sup>70</sup>

The rumour was spread around that communists had infiltrated the protest movement; Nkrumah was branded a communist. The Gold Coast Governor in his *Brief Narrative of Events*, distributed by the government in March, stated that the UGCC's 'Working Committee showed additional links with the communist organisations overseas...and a danger of new forms of terrorism...These included assassination.'<sup>71</sup> In London, Colonial Office Minister David Rees-Williams stated on 1 March in the House of Commons that 'there was almost certainly Communist incitement'. Arthur Creech Jones, the Colonial Secretary 'had given credence to the theory that communistic influences were at work', reported the *West African Review* in April (p.369).

The UGCC leaders were imprisoned for 'exciting unrest'. Innumerable international protests resulted in their release after six weeks. A commission was appointed to investigate the 'riots'; the UGCC leaders would have to testify. Known as the 'Watson Commission', its report included this about Nkrumah:

...he appears while in Britain to have had Communist affiliations and to have become imbued with a Communist ideology... In London identified with the West African National Secretariat, a body which had for its objects the union of all West African Colonies... It appears to be the precursor of a Union of West African Soviet Socialist Republics... Mr Nkrumah boldly proposes a programme which is all too familiar to those who have studied the technique of countries which have fallen victims of Communist enslavement... Mr Kwame Nkrumah has never abandoned his aims for a Union of West African Soviet Socialist Republics and has not abandoned his foreign affiliations connected with these aims.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The 'Communism in the Colonies' reports are in TNA: CO537/2638. Please see my forthcoming book on these issues.

<sup>71</sup> Austin (1964: 76, fn51).

<sup>72</sup> There is a copy of the Watson Commission Report in the Balme Library at the University of Ghana, Legon; and very interestingly, in the National Archives in

The world 'soviet' was always linked to communism. It is a Russian word meaning 'council'.

It is important to emphasise here that there is absolutely no evidence of a communist infiltration of any kind into Africa south of the Sahara at this time. The only Communist Party in existence was a very small one in South Africa. The USSR, as the colonial powers and the USA, offered scholarships to students, and set up international organisations which supported trade unionists, women and students.

### WANS'1948 Congress

Given the events in the Gold Coast, the proposed Congress for African unity, planned for October in Lagos, could not be held. But Nkrumah did not give up. He visited the French colonial territories in September/October 1948. The Colonial Office report noted that he had been 'identified in Grand Bassam and Port Houet' and that he had a relative named Ussher living in Abidjan. There he met Houphouet-Boigny, who 'had received one of the secret letters by which Nkrumah tried to assist the West African National Congress'. Nkrumah then went to Dakar and probably attended the meeting of the RDA. There he might have met 'the Communist Party representative Barbe'. On his return Nkrumah apparently mentioned that he had met with Léopold Senghor.<sup>73</sup> Was it perhaps as a result of this visit that the RDA, at least according to a British intelligence report, announced in December that it was calling a conference in Liberia? The aim was a West African Federation, as Nkrumah has proposed.<sup>74</sup>

Nkrumah tried again in 1953, but most of the invited delegates could not attend. He finally achieved success in 1958 at the All African People's Conference in Accra.<sup>75</sup>

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Washington: NARA: RG 59, Box 6210, Decimal File, Dept. of State 1945-49, 848N00/11-2448. See also Nkrumah's *Autobiography* (1957:84-87), for his comments.

<sup>73</sup> TNA: FO371/73033B, CO to FO, 23/10/1948; FO537/1638, 10<sup>th</sup> report on 'Communism in the Colonies'.

<sup>74</sup> TNA: CO537/2678, 'Colonial Intelligence Summary No.2'.

<sup>75</sup> Sherwood (2013).

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