

Pan-African Conferences, 1900-1953: What Did 'Pan-Africanism' Mean?

by

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Abstract

The concerns of Pan-Africanists, their philosophies and politics naturally depended on the times they were living in. Nevertheless the call for unity, whether overt or implied has been there for well over a century. This need was perhaps easier to espouse when the proposal was for unity against the imperialist oppressors. Once this was obtained (though it is quite reasonable to argue that it is still there, in new forms), the issue became – and is - far more complex and complicated. Another complication that arose with independence is the whole issue of 'nationalism'. After all, the countries of Africa were created in Berlin by Europeans who ignored existing empires/kingdoms/polities, languages, traditions, religions, cultures: how is a new nation to be created from the plethora of many people's whose histories vis-à-vis each other were often 'problematic'? Or, in the name of African unity, should the boundaries be withdrawn? But then how would you administer – and whom?

This paper will examine the meaning of 'pan-Africanism' as espoused at the at the 1900 and 1945 Pan-African Conference, and by the West African National Secretariat, Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore, until and including pan-African conference in Kumasi in 1953.

The 1900 Pan-African Conference

The conference held in London in 1900 was the work of Henry Sylvester Williams – a Trinidadian then in London working to qualify as a barrister.¹ Williams, the son of immigrant parents from Barbados, grew up in a part of Trinidad where some fairly recent arrivals from Africa and the USA lived. His education might also have been broadened by the exiled Prince Kofi Intim, the son of the deposed King of the Asante, who was staying with the superintendent of the school he attended. He then spent some years in the USA and Nova Scotia before migrating yet again, to the UK. Thus he had certainly learned about many aspects of the lives – and the politics – of those living in the African diaspora. In Britain he met Africans studying and visiting – and learned about the outrageous behaviour of Whites towards Blacks in South Africa from someone speaking of her own experience. This resulted in his forming the African Association in 1897. The Association planned to hold a Conference to investigate and publicise the situation of Blacks in the British Empire. But when Williams met Benito Sylvain, a Haitian residing in Paris who had recently met with Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia, the scope was broadened to cover the treatment of ‘native races’ under European and American rule.

As no records have been preserved, and as naturally contemporary newspaper reporters did not recognise even some known faces, exactly how many people attended is not known. By scouring all possible sources, I have found the names of three Africans attending; fifteen West Indians and nine Africans temporarily in the UK mainly as students; five Black Britons and nineteen visiting African-Americans.² Over three days the Conference heard speakers from the British colonies, the UK and the USA address the many aspects of racial discrimination inflicted on them. It was decided to convert the African Association to the Pan-African Association (PAA). The primary objects of the PAA were:

- to secure civil and political rights for Africans and their descendants throughout the world;
- to encourage friendly relations between the Caucasian and African races;
- to encourage African people everywhere in educational, industrial and commercial enterprise;
- to approach Governments and influence legislation in the interests of the black races; and to ameliorate the condition of the oppressed negro in all parts of the world.

To propagate these aims, Williams travelled to Jamaica and Trinidad and then the USA after the Conference. We know almost nothing about his reception by African-Americans; in the West Indies he succeeded not only in interesting West Indians in the PAA, but in having them form local associations. Among those who joined in Trinidad was H.A. Nurse, whose son Malcolm Ivan was born about a year after Williams’ visit. Malcolm Ivan Nurse is better known as George Padmore.

On his return to the UK, though the Association did not survive, Williams began to produce a journal, *The Pan-African*, of which only one issue has been preserved, though three are noted as being sold in Trinidad. The motto of the journal was 'Liberty and Light' and it was 'issued for the express purpose of diffusing information concerning the interests of the African and his Descendants in the British Empire'. Why Williams had narrowed his vision at that time he does not explain.

So, in 1900, some highly, Western-educated people from Africa and the Diaspora were certainly interested in uniting in some way to address what they saw as the common struggle – against the many and various forms of racial exploitation.

The 1945 Pan-African Conference

George Padmore had been active in pan-African activism in Britain since his resignation from the Comintern in 1934. He joined pro-Abyssinia work of IAFA (International African Friends of Abyssinia) set up by C. L. R. James when Italy was planning to invade Abyssinia with European and Russian support. In 1936 IAFA was replaced by the International African Service Bureau (IASB), which concerned itself mainly with political and labour discrimination issues in Africa and the Diaspora.³ During WWII the IASB's activism had to be reduced; some anti-imperialist activists such as I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson⁴ in Sierra Leone and Richard Hart in Jamaica were jailed for supposedly 'seditious' activism.

Towards the end of the war Padmore and his colleagues (mainly of West Indian origins) resuscitated not only the IASB, but also their Pan-African Federation, formed pre-war. They began to discuss calling a conference and 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 this.⁵ Agreement was reached: the Pan-African Congress would be held in Manchester in October 1945.

Kwame Nkrumah had arrived in Britain from the USA in late May 1945, and accepted George Padmore's offer of the role of Regional Secretary of the Pan-African Federation, partly to aid in the organising of the Congress.⁶ He thus joined a Kenyan, Jomo Kenyatta and a South African, Peter Abrahams among the organising committee. What came to be miscalled the Fifth Pan-African Congress⁷ opened on October 15⁸ There were over two hundred delegates and observers Padmore reported, representing trade unions, farmers, political organisations and students and Black organisations in Britain.⁹ The ANC from South Africa had been invited to send delegates, but they had not been able to obtain passports.¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois was the only African-American present.¹¹ Thus at the Congress Nkrumah met many from the Anglophone colonies who were already, or would become, national/political activists on their return home. But there were no representatives from Francophone Africa; two men are listed as 'fraternal delegates' from Somalia and Mursi Saad El-Din attended as an 'observer' from Egypt.¹²

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 the colonies. The main resolutions were for:

1. 'the complete and absolute independence for the Peoples of West Africa';
2. 'the removal of British armed forces from Egypt'
3. the granting of 'complete independence from Egyptian and British rule' to the Sudan
4. the recognition of the 'demands of the indigenous peoples of Tunis, Algeria, Morocco and Libya from French and Italian rule'
5. 'democratic rights and self-government for the people of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Somaliland and Zanzibar'
6. the non-incorporation of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland in South Africa
7. West Indian federation founded upon internal self-government based on universal adult suffrage
8. 'the withdrawal of the British Military Administration from Ethiopian soil'
9. the independence or at least self-government for all of all British, French and Italian colonies in Africa and the West Indies.¹³

Nkrumah claims that he had drafted the Congress's Declaration to the Colonial People, which 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, for freedom of the press and of assembly. The Declaration concluded with

'Colonial and Subject Peoples of the World, Unite!'¹⁴

A memorandum based on the resolutions was drawn up for submission to the newly formed United Nations. This was given to Du Bois for further endorsement by African-American organisations before it was finally presented to the UN. (But note that there were apparently no suggestions as to which organisations in Africa or the West Indies should be asked for endorsement.) The reworked submission called for 'adequate representation of coloured peoples of the world within the United Nations Organisation...' It admitted that 'the organisation of the Pan-African Congress has not been wholly representative, but it has far-reaching and increasing influence among Negroes and has helped to bring persons of Negro descent in the Americas in sympathy and cooperation with their African brethren. American and West Indian citizens of negro descent regard it as especially appropriate that they should share in the responsibility for the liberation and modern development of Africa.' The Memorandum was now signed by thirty-six organisations from the Americas, Africa and Britain.¹⁵ Whether there was any response from the UN, I have not yet been able to discover.

Thus pan-Africanism had moved on: it was no longer exclusively the interest of the Western-educated elite; it demanded independence or self-government for colonial peoples and trade union rights; and moved from lobbying colonial governments to approaching the United Nations¹⁶. Racial discrimination remained on its agenda. But there were apparently no concrete plans on how to approach the non-Anglophone colonies.

West African National Secretariat

Kwame Nkrumah was suffused with notions of African unity from very early in his life. In his autobiography, he states that while training to be a teacher he did not find Aggrey's philosophy that 'black and white races should work together' very 'practicable'. He also records that he had met S.R. Wood, who 'first introduced me to politics'.¹⁷ But Nkrumah does not mention meeting Moscow-trained I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, then very active in the Gold Coast – or reading the criticism of him in the *Gold Coast Independent* as a 'foreigner', and thus with no right to intervene in politics.¹⁸

While studying in the USA Francis (as he then called himself) Nkrumah had written about the need for a West African Federation to enable Africans to 'rule and govern themselves without outside interference'.¹⁹ In 1942 he sent a program, (of which I have not been able to find a copy), to a fellow student from the Gold Coast, K.A.B. Jones-Quartey, in order for him to use it as 'a starting point for the developments and unifications of which I speak'. 'It is our task', he wrote, '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'.²⁰

As noted above, Nkrumah went to Britain to complete his formal education. However, it was his political education that was advanced, by Padmore and his colleagues in the Pan-African Federation and at the politically active West African Students Union (WASU)²¹. On 14 December 1945, so just a couple of months after the Manchester Congress, Kojo Botsio²², Bankole Awoonor-Renner²³, Ashie Nikoi²⁴, Wallace-Johnson, Bankole Akpata²⁵ and Nkrumah formed the West African National Secretariat.²⁶ They intended to foster the spirit of unity and solidarity among West Africans, and to 'educate' Africans, partly by publishing a monthly paper.²⁷ The West African National Secretariat (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:

1. supply information...with a view to realising a West African Front for United West African National Independence
2. to educate the peoples, especially the working classes, in the imperialist countries concerning the problems of West Africa
3. to foster a spirit of national unity and solidarity within West Africa
4. 'to engineer the formation of an All-West African National Congress'.²⁸

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'. Further, it pointed out that 'the existing territorial divisions in Africa [are] politically, socially, economically and from the point of view of security, 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.'²⁹

In March the first issue of WANS' journal, the *New African* was published. It reported on African issues and one article was always in French. The monthly's motto was 'For Unity and Absolute Independence'. Lack of funds prevented publication after the July issue.

Nkrumah argued that the 'history, social customs, economic and political institutions', which had made 'West Africa one', had been destroyed by imperialism. But what made Nkrumah believe that West Africa had been 'one'? Should we presume that he had had no access to even the little history of West Africa that had been published by then? But he could not have needed textbooks, given that he grew up in a 'country' where there were over 100 native languages! Why did he choose to ignore that West Africa, as the rest of that vast continent, had been divided by empires, kingdoms, states, and smaller non-hierarchical 'states' for the thousands of years of its history? How could he ignore this, given that it was only by speaking the colonisers' languages that Africans within the modern states could communicate with each other, given the plethora of languages within each state?

In the Nigerian paper, the *Comet*, on 11 September 1946 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.... A united free and independent West Africa is the political condition for Africa's redemption and emancipation. West Africa is the fulcrum of the lever of Africans and peoples of African descent have to wield for the emancipation of Africa.'* (p.1)

WANS/WASU Conference 1946

As there had been no Francophone representatives at the Manchester Congress, Nkrumah went to Paris to discuss issues with Léopold Senghor (Senegal), Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast), Lamine Guéye (Senegal) and Sourou Apathy (Benin), all 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'.³⁰

WANS and WASU now went on to hold a 3-day conference in September 1946, on the theme of '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' including 'two or three women and a small number of Europeans'.

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 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.'³¹

Reports of the conference and the resolutions were widely distributed, for example to *West Africa* (London-based, read in West Africa) and to the *West African Pilot* (Nigeria, 20/9/1946, p.1). 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...'. (How right he was!)

Joseph Appiah³², then a student in Britain who had attended the Manchester Congress, states that he went to France on behalf of WANS in early 1947. He states that he met 'Maitre Pinto'³³; Leopold Senghor and M.A. Diop³⁴ of Senegal, Dr Zinsou³⁵ and Mr Apithy of Benin'; Mohamed El-Masoud of the Neo Destour Party³⁶, Mohamed Bensalem Elkohnen of Istiqal Party of Morocco and Mohamed Aloui, also of that party. It was encouraging to know that the bug of freedom had also bitten all these friends. My job had been eased by this discovery and it only remained for me to tell them of our activities in Britain and in our respective countries in British West Africa as well as the need for a get-together.'³⁷ Was this the 'Paris meeting', which the 1946 Conference decided had to precede the proposed congress in West Africa? If so, then the range of contacts in Francophone Africa had certainly broadened.

According to MI5 surveillance records, Nkrumah had asked for support from the British Communist Party (CPGB) for the proposed conference. The 'spooks' also record in September 1947 that Nkrumah had visited France again: he had had a 'long interview with Raymond Barbé', of the French Communist Party's (PCF) Central Committee, and also met with the 'directors' of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), the pan-Africanist/nationalist party recently formed by Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Another report confirms that Nkrumah had been 'accredited by the CPGB to the colonial section of the PCF to meeting Paris 6/8/47.'³⁸

It has to be noted that now the proposed West African National Congress was eventually to become the 'United Socialist States of Africa' and that an attempt was made to involve many African nationalists in the planning process.

WANS, and Nkrumah, 1947-1948

A few months later, Nkrumah published a pamphlet, *Towards Colonial Freedom* in which he analysed the effects of colonialism on Africa and severely criticised European policies, often from an avowedly Marxist perspective. He argued again that:

*West African colonies...must unite and become a national entity, absolutely free from the encumbrances of foreign rule... Thus the goal...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 COLONIES, UNITE. The working men of all countries are behind you.*³⁹

It seems as if Nkrumah could not decide whether he was trying to forge an African or a West African unity. Or was the latter to precede the former? Did the Conference's recognition of a need for a 'common language' appear to pose an insuperable problem – and thus one to be ignored? And was Nkrumah so impressed with communist philosophy that he really believed that the White working classes would support colonial independence?

But, at least for Nkrumah, such questions had to be postponed as he accepted the offer of the secretaryship of the United Gold Coast Convention, a new political party in the Gold Coast.⁴⁰ He left the UK in November 1947.

Nkrumah's departure did not mean that the calling of a Conference was abandoned. At the end of the year, Bankole Awoonor-Renner, the chairman, issued a New Year message from London 'to all colonial peoples of West Africa and "freedom Lovers the world over"⁴¹, and repeated the call for a congress:

According to the present plan, the All-West African National Congress will be held at Lagos, Nigeria, from October tenth to twentieth, 1948. The main objective will be the formulation of a plan for the unity and National independence of all West African peoples, leading eventually to the Democratic Federation of All West African Territories, and the furtherance of immediate political economic and social demands. The peoples of West Africa will be represented at this Congress by their political, cultural, or educational organisations, Trades Unions, co-operatives or Farmers' organisations, by their natural rulers, and any group of individuals who desire to attend.

It is being suggested that Congress Committees be formed in Gambia as in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Portuguese Guinea, French Sudan, Liberia, Equatorial Africa, Belgian Congo, Cameroons, Gold Coast, Nigeria, Togoland, and Dahomey with the purpose of drawing together all the organisations and Native Authorities to discuss the aims and organisation of the Congress, to give it publicity and to solicit and collect money needed for its organisation.

In preparation for October 10th to 20th, a Congress Reception Committee is being set up in Lagos, Nigeria to organise accommodations, technical arrangements, and social activities for the Congress...

West Africa and the World will probably be hearing more of the West African National Congress in the fairly near future.

It is important to note here that this was issued by Awoonor-Renner, who had published his *West African Soviet Union* in London in 1946. This proposed a federation West African socialist states which would lead the fight for African unity. But these points were not made in the call for the Congress.

With such fairly concrete plans and having apparently discussed the way forward with many people, why was the conference not convened? One reason was probably that once Nkrumah had taken up his position with the UGCC and had begun to assess the situation in the Gold Coast – after all, he had been absent for twelve years – he realised that he had much to learn and much to do at home. It is also possible that he realised he also had to face surveillance by the British government – after all, WANS offices in London had been raided and the interrogation he underwent at the dockside in Liverpool prior to departure indicated that he had been under close surveillance.⁴² This might have made communication with colleagues in London and Paris more problematic than it might have been from London.

But was there perhaps also a problem with trying to hold a conference in Nigeria? Struggles for independence were ongoing there and hence the colonial government would have been very wary of any nationalist/pan-Africanist events. Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), was supportive of the proposed conference, and might well have discussed it with colleagues in London (e.g. Brockway, Padmore) and in France during his visit in October 1949.⁴³

Nkrumah, 1948-1953

One can easily imagine that the struggle for self-government and independence demanded all Nkrumah's attention – and he also had to deal with the UGCC - the opposition party - led by Dr. Danquah. He might also have wished to not offend the British Governor at this crucial period of Gold Coast struggles. However, the situation changed after the CPP won the 1951 elections and he was inaugurated as Leader of Government Business. After further struggles, the constitution was changed and in 1952 Nkrumah became Prime Minister of the now partly self-governing colony.

But, if the reports by MI5 are correct, Nkrumah did not abandon plans to call a pan-African conference. It seems that soon after his arrival home he 'crossed into French territory by the overland route via Half Assini... met with RDA official on Ivory Coast', the MI5 ('Military Intelligence' – i.e., British secret intelligence agency) files reveal. 'May be in Dakar for RDA meeting?' the file questions.⁴⁴ According to the West African Political Intelligence Summary for November 1948 Nkrumah had met with 'leading African politicians and probably representatives of the African section of the French Communist Party'.⁴⁵ This surveillance report then noted that Nkrumah had announced the postponement of the conference.

The report for September 1949 notes that Nkrumah had invited Azikiwe and Wallace-Johnson to a meeting in Accra, to be held on 11 September. The Nigerian police reported that Zik could not attend but might stop in Accra en route to the meeting he would be attending in Prague. Wallace-Johnson 'had tried to book a passage but was rejected as he is listed as a prohibited immigrant in the Gold Coast'.⁴⁶

Nkrumah did not give up. In March 1951, MI5 reported that Nkrumah had booked a flight to Kankam in Guinea, but had been stopped at Abidjan by the French authorities. Had Nkrumah planned to meet with the French pan-Africanists? In August, Nkrumah is reported as planning a newspaper for the 'West African colonies to agitate for a United States of Africa', and stating that 'strategic plans for French possessions well under way for unification... He would work hand-in-hand with Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC and Wallace-Johnson's nationalist movements in Sierra Leone'.⁴⁷

The few files released of the surveillance of Nkrumah reveal that he was in constant correspondence with George Padmore, who was, inter alia, working with Fenner Brockway's Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism (COPAI). Nkrumah invited Padmore to the Gold Coast: he toured the country and spoke at many public meetings in July-August 1951. He helped draw up the CPP's new constitution, which included⁴⁸:

- a) to work with other nationalist democratic and socialist movement in Africa ...with a view to abolish imperialism, colonialism, racialism and tribalism
- b) to abolish all forms of national and racial oppression and economic inequality
- c) to support the demand for a West African Federation and Pan-Africanism by promoting unity of action among the peoples of Africa and of African descent.⁴⁹

However, according to the secret reports sent back to the Colonial Office (CO), Nkrumah had not discussed these proposed constitutional changes with the CPP's Cabinet.

Both Fenner Brockway⁵⁰ and George Padmore pressed Nkrumah to call a pan-African conference. While the work of COPAI awaits a historian, plans for a conference are confirmed in a letter from MI5 to the CO, dated 26 March 1952: 'doubtful if projected COPAI/ CPP conference will take place... COPAI has underestimated financial difficulties and has left too much to the last minute for arrangements re travel, etc.... Perhaps Padmore and Brockway could go out. HE (i.e., Gold Coast Governor Charles Arden-Clarke) has discussed this with Nkrumah, who said the time was inopportune. But if there is a conference, it will be under the aegis of the CPP, not COPAI.' Another letter to the CO states that Nkrumah had approached Hastings Banda⁵¹ regarding the proposed conference.⁵²

Nkrumah pressed on. In January 1953 he visited Liberia; in his address to the Legislature he stated that the 'ideal closest to my heart is the union of all the peoples of West Africa'. But the Liberians were reported as being unenthusiastic; after all, they had always been independent and did not want to 'play second fiddle to the CPP'.⁵³ Nkrumah clearly did not abandon conference planning with COPAI, if the Intelligence report dated 25 February 1953 is correct: 'COPAI', the Gold Coast 'spook' reported, 'is in communication with the CPP... It has received approving letters from North Africa, unspecified sources in Kenya and Uganda. COPAI suggests that if not possible to hold conference in the Gold Coast, then the Sudan. Sayed Siddick el Mahdi, in London – favourable. Padmore and Mbiyu Koinange have asked to serve on the COPAI Committee.'⁵⁴

The Kumasi Conference, December 1953

In April 1953 Nkrumah announced a conference would be held in August, of 'nationalist leaders in West Africa as well as leaders of other organisations against imperialism'.⁵⁵ Plans would be laid for 'united West African development and the co-ordination of nationalist movements'. This would be the forerunner to a 'Pan-African Conference in 1954 to discuss Africa as a whole'.⁵⁶ The *Sunday Observer* reported on 19 May that Nkrumah 'has for some time been trying to win the leadership in a Pan-African movement... congress sponsored by him... in Accra... second in Nyasaland or Tanganyika'.⁵⁷ Various lists of invitees, including Trade Union Councils were published, for example in the *Gold Coast Independent* on 13 November and the *Ashanti Sentinel* on 24 November; and in Nigeria's *West African Pilot* on 30 November and 5 & 9 December. The *Ashanti Sentinel* reported on 27 November 'a stream of cablegrams and letters to the Prime Minister from all over West Africa and also some international figures in Europe and the USA, expressing willingness to be present'.

Why had Nkrumah moved from August to December? And why did he hold the conference in Kumasi, the capital of the Asante kingdom, when he had been in constant conflict with the Asantehene (King), who certainly did not want to be 'ruled' by the CPP, led by 'commoners' such as Nkrumah, who was deemed by some as being under communist influence. Did Nkrumah want to demonstrate that at least in international terms he *was* superior to the Asantehene? Was it this demonstration of his power that confirmed for the 'upper class', led by the Asantehene, of the necessity to form what became the National Liberation Movement?⁵⁸

What is even more interesting is that the list of invitees differs in each publication. Did Nkrumah fear that if he announced all the names, the colonial authorities would become even more alarmed and attempt to prevent the conference taking place? But it was not only the colonialists who were interested: US officials in Accra, who were in close touch with G.H. Saloway, the Gold Coast's Minister for External Affairs, obtained a list of invitees. In a discussion in May 1953 Mr Saloway 'pointed out that should Nkrumah insist on having the conference, the British would take steps to prevent it'.⁵⁹ (It has to be emphasised here that the USA's interest the Gold Coast had grown massively after WWII; at the colonial Governors' conference in London in 1948 agreement had been reached on 'the importance of co-operation with the US'.⁶⁰)

In one of the many letters intercepted and copied by MI5 there is a draft of the conference agenda and a new date for the meeting: October 1953, Accra. Was this information correct? Was this a second postponed date? The plan was for a three-day conference to discuss 'inter-territorial communities, political, economic and social development and West African unity (unifications)'. There was also a list of 'proposed invitees', which differs considerably from the lists published in November:

- *Gambia*: I.M. Jahumpa, Henry M. Jones, Rev. J.C. Faye;
- *Sierra Leone*: Bankole Bright, Margai, Wallace Johnson, Siaka Stevens, Columbus Thompson;
- *Nigeria*: Awolowo, Azikiwe, Iyo Ita, Ikoro, Ade Wale Thompson, Malam Aminu, Ilorin Kibe, Bode Tomas;
- *Senegal*: Gabriel L'Ossier;
- *Ivory Coast*: M. Apithy, M. Houphouet;
- *French Togo*: Sylvanus Olympio;
- *French Guinea*: Abdulai Dialo;
- *Liberia*: two unnamed,
- *Gold Coast*: Danquah, Kojo Botsio, Casely Hayford, Gbedemah, Nii Amaa Ollennu, K.A. Busia, J.H. Allassani⁶¹

But the British government decided not to undertake overt interference: it had long experience of denying either passports or visas to colonials it wanted to prevent travelling – as had the French government, and presumably the Belgian and Portuguese also. And, as noted previously, the Gold Coast had an old prohibited immigrants list! So overt interference was not required to prevent people from attending. This meant that of the many invited, only the following attended: from Nigeria, Funmilayo Ransome- Kuti⁶², Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC), H.O. Davies (Action Group), and Mallam Aminu Kano (Northern People’s Congress); Adewale Thompson, the Secretary of the CPP of Nigeria; Kole Balogun of the NCNC Youth Association in Nigeria; Mr Conton, a Sierra Leonean living in the Gold Coast; Lloyd Wishnant, the Liberian consul in Accra and Kate Johnson Ugbona and Professor Dempster of Liberia; and many CPP members.

The Organising Committee stated that its ‘political objective’ was the ‘establishment of a strong and truly federal state, capable of protecting itself from outside invasion and able to preserve internal security’. The federation should be a parliamentary democracy that respects the traditions of various communities comprising West Africa. Such a state should give hope and create an atmosphere of goodwill among peoples of African descent all over the world... In external relations, such a Federation should cultivate the friendship of states interested in the destiny of Africa.’⁶³

Though it was clearly a very unrepresentative meeting, both in terms on countries (colonies) and political activists, agreement was reached for the necessity to form a permanent West African National Congress. This would work to ‘advance the political, economic and social emancipation of all West Africa, of all Africa and of people of African descent, and lay the foundations for a federation of West Africa, and for Pan-Africanism.’ The headquarters would be in the Gold Coast; the Federation would ‘embrace all sections of Africans and people of African descent’; membership would be by political parties and organisations.

Nkrumah pressed that the conference was a ‘step towards the liberation of the whole of Africa’. The Congress should meet again in 1954 to delineate ways to achieve federation.⁶⁴ The Statement issued also argued that a ‘Federation would be capable of protecting itself from outside invasion and preserve internal security. [It would be] along the lines of a parliamentary democracy, respecting the traditions of various communities and should aim at creating an atmosphere of goodwill among peoples of African descent over the world. The Federation should also cultivate the friendship of States interested in the destiny of Africa and identify itself with the Commonwealth of Nations.’⁶⁵

Padmore could not return to attend this gathering but sent a message, printed in the *Ashanti Sentinel*. He asked those attending ‘to share their experiences, study the techniques of organisation, propaganda and party discipline... and review the shortcomings and mistakes of their respective movements’. He then listed what he believed were the ‘fundamental factors which constitute the essential elements for the successful realisation of [their] objectives’.

He compared 'the disintegration of the tribal structure of social order under the impact of external economic and social forces' to the movement in Europe from tribalism to feudalism and then to capitalism. But this had taken centuries, whereas Africans had to achieve very quickly. Tribal loyalties were being replaced by 'more embracing loyalties, which must be canalised if they are to serve usefully the emergent national aspirations'.

Political parties must move beyond tribal loyalties and reflect the social, political and economic hopes of the common people, cutting across sentiments of race, tribe, colour and creed... National integration can only be realised through nation-wide parties embracing all citizens... In their endeavours to create modern national states out of heterogeneous tribal communities, African leaders must always keep in view the objectives of a Federated West Africa, the precursor of a United States of Africa... Africa must not repeat the pitiful blunders of a disunited warring Europe.

Padmore then listed the 'exacting demands upon those who assume political leadership, which included 'resistance to material temptations' and to the 'wiles' of the British, and not to become divorced from the mass of the people... Leaders are the servants of their people, not their masters... Any departure from this relationship between the leaders and the people opens the door to dictatorship... African political leaders must seek to create a new social order... a more egalitarian and humanistic and just society.

He then went on to warn that 'there is today the great danger of a ready acceptance of the material values of Europe and America', and used Mahatma Gandhi's beliefs and policies to demonstrate that ostentation was not a necessary prerequisite to power. 'The leaders of the West African political parties must strive to close the social gap between the leaders and the people, between the "haves" and have-nots". Only in this way can bribery and corruption be purged from the body politic.'

Padmore's message ended with his hopes that the lessons learned at the Conference will 'benefit the... common advance towards self-determination and the ultimate realisation of West African Federation'.⁶⁶

What is most curious is that Padmore's message was printed in the *Ashanti Sentinel* on December 10, 11 and 12, that is, *after* the conference was over. I can only presume that the MI5 delayed Padmore's letter to the *Sentinel* in order to ensure that it would not be published in time for those attending the conference to read and digest, and then to discuss.

However, as Nkrumah had to deal with the challenges of internal politics prior to independence this proposed meeting was not held till after freedom from colonial rule was achieved in 1957.⁶⁷ I also imagine that he had learned that the colonial powers had many ways of co-operating with each other in order to prevent African co-operation. However, once independence was achieved, he could not be dealt with so easily!

Within the first year of his premiership of independent Ghana, with the help of George Padmore, Nkrumah convened the Conference of Independent African States and then the All-African Peoples' Conference, to attempt to put into practice the 1953 suggestions and resolutions.

Today we have the African Union, the descendant of these conferences, these beliefs and these philosophies. But does the Union have a solution; is it trying to find solutions to the questions raised by its forerunners? The issues of boundaries, languages, non-materialism, non-elitism, equality, and well administered socialist states? How can the immense problems inherent in trying to create a 'nation' out of many peoples be resolved? (It certainly has not been resolved in Europe.) And without schools, and schools with exercise books and texts and maps, what does the word 'Africa' mean to the 'masses'? Finally, while it might have been possible to gather people together initially to fight against racism, and then to fight for independence, it is clearly not proving easy to unite governments to confront the new forms of imperialism, from which too many individuals have grown very wealthy while the mass of the people remain impoverished.

Endnotes

¹ See James R. Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist*, London: Collings, 1975 and Marika Sherwood, *The Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams and the African Diaspora* (forthcoming, Routledge 2010)

² There were also two Indians resident in the UK attending, as well as fifteen White Brits. Many of those from the USA had been to Paris to the World Exhibition there.

³ I am currently gathering information on the work of the IASB and the Pan-African Federation between 1936 and the outbreak of WWII.

⁴ Sierra Leonean, partly Moscow-educated, Wallace-Johnson was a major political activist in West Africa during these years. See Leo Spitzer & LaRay Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League', *International Jnl. of African Historical Studies*, 6/3, 1973, pp.413-452, & 6/4 1973, pp.565-601.

⁵ Thus Padmore was following in the footsteps of Williams in yet another way, by using the opportunities of another international conference to facilitate attendance.

⁶ On Nkrumah, see Marika Sherwood, *Kwame Nkrumah: the years abroad 1935 – 1947*, Legon: Freedom Publications, Ghana, 1996. According to the Congress' report, *Colonial and Coloured Unity*, he was also the Secretary of the Publicity Committee.

⁷ Why Padmore et al called this the 5th Congress, when in fact it was the 6th remains a mystery to me. By doing this he acquiesced to DuBois excluding the 1900 Conference from the history of Pan-African congresses.

⁸ For a full account of the calling of the Congress, for reminiscences, biographies of delegates and organisations and Padmore's full account, see Adi and Sherwood (1995) and also Marika Sherwood, *Manchester and the 1945 Pan-African Congress*, London: Savannah Press, London 1995.

⁹ George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* London: Dobson 1956, pp.161-170.

¹⁰ Hakim Adi & Marika Sherwood, *The 1945 Pan-African Congress Revisited*, London: New Beacon 1995, p.114. Not issuing passports became the usual tactic by the colonial authorities to prevent travel and attendance at what were seen as anti-British/imperialist meetings.

¹¹ This might have been due to enormous problems with travel as WWII had just ended.

¹² Mursi Saad El-Din, 'Pan-African Odyssey', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 19-25 July 2001. Dr. Mursi, journalist, editor, poet, political activist, served as Egypt's first Cultural Attaché in the UK. (www.egypttoday.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=2232)

¹³ The full resolutions are in Adi & Sherwood (1995), pp.102 – 112.

¹⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom* (1947), London: Heinemann 1962, p.44; Adi & Sherwood (1995).

¹⁵ Vincent Bakpetu Thompson, *Africa and Unity*, London: Longmans 1969, pp.338-342.

¹⁶ For early attempts to have a voice at the UN, see Marika Sherwood, "'There is no new deal for the black man in San Francisco": African attempts to influence the founding conference of the United Nations April - July 1945', *International Jnl. of African Historical Studies*, 29/1, 1996, pp.71-94.

¹⁷ Samuel Wood, son of a prosperous Cape Coast merchant, a staunch and active member of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (formed in 1897) and served as the secretary of the National Congress of British West Africa, the first pan-African organisation on the Anglophone West Coast formed in 1920, also by the Western-educated elite. He was one of the founder members of the United Gold Coast Convention, the post-war nationalist political party. There is a brief biography of Wood in I.S. Ephson, *Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities*, Accra: Clen Publishers, 1969.

¹⁸ Leo Spitzer & LaRay Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League', *International Jnl. of African Historical Studies*, 6/5, 1973, pp.413-452; quotation is from p.438.

¹⁹ Francis Nwia-Kofi Nkrumah, 'Education and nationalism in Africa', *Education Outlook*, November 1943, p. 9. On his years in the USA and Britain, see Marika Sherwood, *Kwame Nkrumah: the years abroad*, Legon: Freedom Publications 1996.

²⁰ 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'.

²¹ On WASU, see Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998.

²² Kojo Botsio became a founding member of the CPP in the Gold Coast; was the first minister of Education in the Nkrumah government, prior to independence. His ministerial appointments include Social Welfare, Transport and Communications, Agriculture, Trade and Development. He was appointed Foreign minister twice, between 1958 and 1959 and then from 1963 to 1965. In 1945 he was still a post-graduate student in Geography and Education at Brasenose College, Oxford University.

²³ Awoonor-Renner, had been espousing the creation of 'one Federated West African State...strong, and independent free from feudalism' since 1937', quoted by S.K.B. Asante, 'Kwame Nkrumah and Pan-Africanism: the Early Phase 1945 – 1961', *Universitas* 3/1, 1973, p. p.39. See Awoonor-Renner's *West African Soviet Union* (London 1946, p.7) in which he had called for 'one Federated West African State...strong, and independent free from feudalism'. (See my entry on him in the forthcoming *Dictionary of African Biography*, OUP, 2011)

²⁴ G. Ashie Nikoi was an old activist: co-founder of the Farmers' Committee of British West Africa he was among the leaders of the 'Cocoa Boycott', an attempt to obtain reasonable prices for cocoa; he represented the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society at Manchester and became one of the founders of the CPP.

²⁵ Nigerian student Akpata was a member of the Communist Party; he served as assistant then as secretary to WANS. When it collapsed he accepted a scholarship offered by Charles University, Prague, to read for a Master's, then PhD degrees. He returned to Nigeria in 1953; when exiled in 1960 he went to work at Nkrumah's Ideological Institute. (See e.g. 'Kwame Nkrumah's Ideological Institute – Winneba, Ghana', on www.niica.oh.ca).

²⁶ See Sherwood (1996), chapter 9; Esedebe (1982), pp. 173– 178; Asante (1973), pp.36-49. This somewhat magnifies the contribution of Nkrumah to the 1945 Congress.

²⁷ Thus they were following in the footsteps of Williams, the *Negro Worker* and the various publications of the IASB.

²⁸ There is a copy of the Aims and Objectives in PRAAD, SC21/2/84 Nkrumah Papers.

²⁹ *New African*, 1/1, March 1946, p.5; *West Africa*, 23/2/1946, p.151. The journal's editor thought it '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'. (p.147) Clearly WANS was facing a huge task.

³⁰ *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson 1957, p.57.

³¹ 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; Yuri Smertin, *Kwame Nkrumah*, Moscow: Progress Publishers 1987, p.62.

³² Appiah joined the CPP on his return to the Gold Coast, but soon broke away and joined the opposition and served the various governments after the 1966 coup in various capacities.

³³ I have not been able to discover who 'Maire Pinto' was. The only nationalist activist by that name I know of is Pio Gama Pinto of Kenya.

³⁴ Was this Alioune Diop of Senegal, founder of the influential journal *Présence Africaine*?

³⁵ Emile Derlin Zinsou was from Benin, not Senegal; he became president in 1968 until 10 December 1969.

³⁶ This was a nationalist party in Tunisia.

³⁷ Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah, The Autobiography Of An African Patriot*, Accra: Asempa Publishers 1996, p.168.

³⁸ TNA: KV2/1948, f.92a, reports July and September 1947; KV2/1947, f.27a, Bagot, 21 October 1947. The RDA was a political party in French West Africa formed in Bamako, Mali, in 1946; initially it had ties to the PCF, but Houphouët-Boigny soon led the party to a more moderate, pro-French stance.

³⁹ Taken from the 1962 reprint by Heinemann; pp.43-44. In his introduction to this republication, Nkrumah states: 'Twenty years ago my ideas on African unity...were limited to West African unity. Today I see the wider horizon of immense possibilities open to Africans – the only guarantee, in fact, for our survival – in a total continental union of Africa.' (pp. x-xi)

⁴⁰ The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) had been formed in August 1947 by Western-educated and wealthy nationalist/political activists

⁴¹ The fullest account of this is in *African Transcripts*, No.14, March 1948. See also, e.g. *Gambia Echo*, Feb. 2, 1948. Awoonor-Renner outlines the suggested very democratic framework for the Council of the Congress.

⁴² Confirmed in TNA: KV2/1847, f.28a, 1 November 1947, on Nkrumah's departure: 'this man's departure is being covered at the ports by Special Branch'.

⁴³ TNA: CO537/4334 Colonial Political Intelligence Summary, September-October 1949,

⁴⁴ TNA: KV2/1847, 6 January 1948.

⁴⁵ TNA: CO537/2677, West African Political Intelligence Summary #1, 10 November 1948. A permanent MI5 officer was posted to the Gold Coast in 1948. (TNA: CO537/2760)

⁴⁶ TNA: KV2/1848, f.116a, West African Secretaries of State, 21 September 1949. Nkrumah could not then have known of this list.

⁴⁷ TNA: KV2/1849, f.142b, report 7 March 1951; f.181a, quoting excerpts from the *African National Times* of 3/8/1951. This was published in Accra by Ako Adjei from September 1948 to January 1952. Unfortunately there are no copies in London.

⁴⁸ This is at least partially confirmed in TNA: KV2/1850, Gold Coast Special Branch, Summary #32, September 1951.

⁴⁹ TNA: CO537/7233, Political Intelligence Summary - Gold Coast, 24 July 1951.

⁵⁰ Brockway was then leading the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism, to which the CPP was affiliated. (TNA: CP968/265, Colonial Political Intelligence, November 1952); he and Nkrumah knew each other well enough during Nkrumah's years in London for him to invite Brockway to visit in 1956 or early 1957. Brockway had, e.g. attended the demonstration called by WANS et al regarding strikes in Nigeria in September 1947. See Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, London: Hart-Davis 1977, pp.202-204.

⁵¹ Dr Hastings Banda and Nkrumah had met during Nkrumah's sojourn in the UK where Dr Banda had a medical practice. In 1953 Banda moved to the Gold Coast and then returned home to Nyasaland in 1958, becoming Prime Minister in 1963 and achieving independence as Malawi in 1964.

⁵² TNA: KV2/1850, MI5 to CO, 26 March 1952 and 14 July 1952.

⁵³ TNA: KV2/1851, copy of report from *The Guardian*, 27 January 1953; *West Africa*, 31 January 1953, p.87.

⁵⁴ TNA: KV2/1851, MI5 to West Africa 25 February 1953, with report from SWIFT, the Gold Coast informant's code-name. Koinange, a US-educated Kikuyu, pan-Africanist/nationalist went on to serve as independent Kenya's Foreign Minister 1966-1967 and 1969.

⁵⁵ According to Philippe Decraene (*Le Panafricanisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1963, p.34), until Padmore 'arrived' on the scene, the Conference was 'lethargic'. 'However, contact was maintained with Azikiwe, and with Léopold Senghor and Sourous Apithy, who had attended the WANS conference in London twelve years previously.'

⁵⁶ *West Africa*, 11 April 1953, p.325.

⁵⁷ TNA: KV2/1851, typed copy of article.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in the Emergent Ghana*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

⁵⁹ NARA: RG59, Box 3579, 745G.00.11-2753, Embassy, Accra to State Dept, 27/11/1953; 745G.00.5-2253, Embassy, Accra to State Dept. 22/5/1953.

⁶⁰ TNA: FO371/68062 'Anglo-American Co-operation in Africa', memo to the Colonial Office 1 March 1948.

⁶¹ TNA: KV2/1951, letter dated 16 April 1953. To whom it was addressed is not given, but I guess it would have been to Padmore. Literally hundreds of letters between Nkrumah and Padmore, both using apparently ever-changing aliases and addresses were intercepted. – some were just noted, others were copied.

⁶² Mrs Ransome-Kuti, a life-long political activist, was then the President-General of the Federation of Women's Organisations in Nigeria.

⁶³ *West Africa*, 12 December 1953, p.465; *Daily Graphic*, 8 December, p.1. The conference was widely reported in the Gold Coast and Nigerian papers I have been able to see, as well as in African-American, and UK and USA daily papers.

⁶⁴ *Daily Graphic*, 4 December 1953, pp.1, 12; 7 December, p.1 and 8 December, p.1; *Spectator Daily*, 8 December 1953, p.1; *Ashanti Sentinel*, 11 December 1953, p.1; *African Morning Post*, 8/12/1953, p.1. The London –based journal *West Africa* commented that 'One hopes that the initiative will one day bear fruit, even though a political federation of West African territories now seems as unlikely as a federation of Western Europe.' (19 December 1953, p.1177-78). In its brief report the *Chicago Courier* (26 December 1953, p.1) states that Nkrumah's plan is for 'one independent African government'.

⁶⁵ *West Africa* 19 December 1953, cover page; *West African Review*, February 1954, pp.112-3 with a number of photographs of the event.

⁶⁶ *The Ashanti Sentinel*, 10, 11 and 12 December 1953

⁶⁷ For an analysis of Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, see Asante (1973).