Issues of Decolonization:
(2) Local Issues: non-settler colonies
Local Issues: non-settler colonies

Basil Davidson
Africa: ‘rise of nationalism’
[1:00 – 5:33]
(unfortunately not on YouTube)
Debate: which were more significant in the Decolonization process – ‘external’ or ‘internal’ – factors?

- last day examined some of the so-called ‘external’ issues: colonial domestic politics, post-war weak European economies, larger ‘empire’ problems (including independence of India), conflicting pressures of Cold War (need to ally with US and its goals), Pan-Africanism (as international movement, can also be seen as ‘African’ generated)
Local Issues: non-settler colonies

- today and Friday will explore ‘internal’ (local) African issues as experienced and articulated by Africans

- these differed significantly between ‘non-settler’ colonies (like French Soudan, Gold Coast) and ‘settler’ colonies (like Mozambique, Kenya, Belgian Congo – and South Africa)

[see ‘5th Pan-African Congress Testimonies’ in Additional Readings; full programme in ‘5th Pan-African …Documents, in ‘Resources’ – includes section specifically on South Africa] Look at in class!
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Gold Coast:
- considered most ‘advanced’ of colonies (followed by Nigeria – both knew parallel political developments) [see Monday’s lecture ]

- investment in ‘economic development’ on one hand, coupled by continued restrictions on foreign trade on the other…

- coupled with frustrations with European merchants’ group dominating export trade (part of issue)…
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- exacerbated by policy on disease affecting main export crop, cocoa

- swollen root disease: crops to be destroyed, no exceptions...

Economic Policies Heightening Discontent!
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February, 1948:

- rise in prices European goods: led to boycott
- successful, merchants lowered prices

- paved way for protest march (28 Feb.): several hundred ex-servicemen seeking overdue pension payments, long-promised jobs!!
- rallying point for discontent
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- march neared Governor’s Residence:
  army ordered to fire on marchers

  - 29 killed, 237 injured

Not Major Event in terms of Larger Picture
BUT had significant and widespread implications

Video:
Davidson: ‘Africa: Rise of Nationalism’
[5:34 – 8:20min]
Locally:

- showed younger generation that its elders had been co-opted into belief in moderation that was ineffective

- clearly UGCC could no longer speak for ‘the people’: a new voice was needed
Neither Nkrumah nor youth league of UGCC (CYO) involved in ‘Riots’ – but profited:

- 1949: Nkrumah created Convention People’s Party (rooted in youth group)

CPP Poster & Flag
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West Africa:

- spoke to servicemen everywhere

- accentuated in context of labour uproar over French West African rail-strike (below)

- revealed British weakness in resorting to violence
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Britain:
- challenged illusion of peaceful, prosperous Gold Coast, ‘model colony’
- violence did not play well to domestic crowd: popular support in Britain declining
- led to major, public investigation
“…the investigation into the riots … proved most significant for the future of the [Gold Coast] territory.

From this eventually emerged the Henley Coussey Commission, led by a prominent African lawyer of that name, whose recommendations, which included a new constitution based on new democratic procedures and greater representation for Africans at all levels …"
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“the Henley Coussey Commission, led by a prominent African lawyer of that name, whose recommendations, which included a new constitution based on new democratic procedures and greater representation for Africans at all levels, formed the basis of the future based on new democratic procedures and greater representation for Africans at all levels…”

- Still it was clear “Britain desired to maintain strict control over the future of the Gold Coast” (and by extension, West Africa)

[quotation from ‘Wind of Change’, 2006, Additional Readings]
What Were Local Grievances? Mostly economic but had several sources of discontent:
- foreign trade and continued dominance of Europeans: merchants/import-exporters
- cocoa economy more generally (e.g. disease)
- expectations of WWII veterans of pensions, health care, jobs
- had ‘political ring’ in servicemen’s voices: ‘fought for Britain… where is return?’
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Consequences:

- attempt to paint resistance as ‘Communist’, led by UGCC (hence Nkrumah): led to his imprisonment

- party not involved but Nkrumah and followers imprisoned: became ‘martyrs’

- inquiry led to more reforms . . .

Impact far outweighed actual event itself!
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French West Africa:

- ‘positive’ aspects of Brazzaville emphasized, exploited

- new political voices, among them Rassemblement Democratique Africaine (Bamako, 1946)

- political activity paralleled in all 12 colonies
- included many future leaders

- aims to achieve ‘better deal’ within French Empire [particular understanding of ‘decolonization’ – see lecture Feb. 11]

- repeal of Forced Labour, work of Lamine Gueye of Senegal, first major step

- underscoring importance of labour issues
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- labour unions representative of post-war discontent

- most well-known, influential action:
  Oct. 1947 – Mar. 1948 strike by railway workers throughout French West Africa, supported by wharf workers Dahomey, Ivory Coast

- over 17,000 railway workers and 2,000 workers in the wharfs refused to work.
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Goals: to...

- set effective date that the auxiliaries (temporary workers with limited rights) were allowed into cadres (hierarchy in which permanent personnel were placed)

- set level employee had to attain on test to get a promotion

- ameliorate conditions for furloughs
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Goals: To...

- give housing to all employees

- give the indemnity zone benefit (supplement to wages intended to offset geographical differences in cost of living) to all eligible employees
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- France took three months to respond, believing difficulties of being out of work would bring end to strike without action on its part

- wrong: workers received support from communities – merchants, farmers, local religious clerics

- newspaper-funded collection drive

- women played central role
Local Issues: non-settler colonies

- ultimately successful
- only Ivory Coast withdrew from strike and accepted negotiated agreement
- others received desired benefits
- strike had important impact on French economic development plans in AOF
Local Issues: non-settler colonies

Now-famous novel “Gods bits of wood” was penned by Senegalese writer and film maker Sembene Ousmane to memorialize strike
Himself once a dockworker in Marseilles, all his novels are highly politicized.

“The men and women who... took part in this struggle for a better way of life owe nothing to anyone: neither to any ‘civilizing mission’, nor to any parliament or parliamentarian. Their example was not in vain. Since then, Africa has made progress.”

(“Gods bits of wood” novel excerpt in ‘Selected Stories’)