

Cocoa War on the Gold Coast

By George Padmore

African cocoa growers on the Gold Coast are staging what amounts to a general strike against European capitalists, this writer asserts

TROUBLE has broken out on the Gold Coast. An agrarian strike has been declared. Thousands of cocoa farmers, incensed by the attempt on the part of the British monopoly trading companies and merchants to obtain their cocoa below its real value, are holding up their crops. Motor transport workers and dockers are refusing to handle the goods of foreign firms, while a nationwide boycott of British commodities has been proclaimed. The entire economic life of West Africa's richest colony is at a standstill. Clashes have occurred between the people and the military.

The trouble began during the latter part of October, but the authorities are trying to prevent the news from getting abroad. According to authentic reports reaching London, thousands of native cocoa producers of the Gold Coast and Ashanti have been holding meetings at Suhum, Nsawam, Kibi, Dodowah, and other cocoa-producing districts, for the purpose of discussing ways and means of defending themselves against imperialist oppression.

Great indignation was expressed at these meetings against the unscrupulous methods adopted by the representatives of British finance-capital to exploit the African peasants through an association known as the Pool.

The farmers have agreed that unless the Europeans increase their price they are not going to sell them any cocoa. Strike committees under the leadership of the chiefs—including Sir Ofori Atta, a picturesque ruler well known in England—have been set up to see that there is no blacklegging. Such offenders will be punished by the native tribunals.

The strike, coupled with the boycott, has drawn the entire country into action. The urban population, most of whom are related to the farmers, are also refusing to buy foreign goods. For the first time in the history of Africa, three million people have taken up the challenge against vested interest and have applied the economic strike weapon. This is symptomatic of the New Africa, which is gradually becoming conscious of its strength, and is learning to use Gandhi's well-known technique, the boycott, with effect.

The prolongation of the cocoa impasse is a matter of serious importance to all connected with the West African trade, writes the "Liverpool Daily Post," the most influential journal of that great seaport. The paper reports that according to the latest information received by the Chamber of Commerce

from Africa, the result of the trade turnover has been alarming. One large store in Accra, the capital of Gold Coast, where sales normally run to many thousands of pounds per week, is reported to have taken only a few shillings in six days.

How the Pool Operates

In order to understand what is meant by the "Pool" and how it operates, it will first of all be necessary to say a few words about the agrarian question on the Gold Coast. This colony produces more than half the world's supply of cocoa. Unlike other cocoa-producing countries such as Brazil, Fernando Po and San Thomé, cocoa in the Gold Coast is produced by more than 100,000 farmers. The land is owned collectively by the tribes under the trusteeship of paramount chiefs, who, on the advice of their councils, grant allotments to the heads of households, who cultivate the lots with the aid of their families. There are few plantations on the Gold Coast. Now the reason why Gold Coast Africans own more land than their brothers in Kenya and South Africa is due largely to climatic conditions. There are no highlands and temperate regions in West Africa suitable for permanent white settlement, so the imperialists have allowed the Gold Coast blacks to remain on the land, but have compelled them to grow crops such as cocoa, cotton, palm oil and kola nuts, etc., which enable them to reap super-profits on the world market. The Gold Coast produces little or no food crops except plantains. The natives must import rice, flour, potatoes and other staple foodstuffs from abroad. The whole country has been turned into a sort of agrarian hinterland for the benefit of British chocolate and confectionary industries. Because of the mono-crop character of Gold Coast agriculture, the trading companies are able to exploit the people with impunity.

To eliminate competition which might benefit the farmers, the trading syndicates have organized themselves into a buying syndicate, commonly known as the "Pool." At the beginning of every crop season the members of the Pool meet and decide upon the price they in-

tend to pay the natives. And in order to guarantee that each member of the Pool receives the amount of cocoa it requires, quotas are allowed according to the estimated crop.

But this is not the only method by which the farmers are exploited. They and their families are also squeezed as consumers. It must be remembered that most of the members of the Pool are firms which have a monopoly on foodstuffs, clothes and other manufactured commodities. So by paying the farmers as little as possible for their raw materials and charging as high as they can for imported goods, these companies are able to clear tremendous profits annually. This is why the natives have tied up the cocoa strike with the boycott movement, for both are directed against one and the same monopoly-capitalist interests.

Cooperatives Crushed

The farmers have made several attempts to organize cooperatives and market their produce in England directly, but every attempt has been crushed. West African peasants are up against some of the most powerful trusts in the Empire, such as United Africa Company, a subsidiary of that financial octopus, Unilever, which has over £100,000,000 assets! Incidentally it might be of interest to readers to know that Unilever made more than £1,000,000 profit last year.

Peasant cocoa-marketing, unless supported by the Government, is bound to fail; for the cocoa industry is a very complicated business involving brokerage, shipping and insurance companies and manufacturers, most of whom are tied up with one another through interlocking directorates and the banks.

The Gold Coast farmers have made several attempts to solicit the support of the Government to regulate the export of cocoa and thus minimize price fluctuation, but without success. The attitude of the Government is influenced by the question of revenue. Approximately sixty per cent. of the Colony's revenue is derived from an export tax on cocoa. A decrease in production would therefore mean a decrease in revenue. A decrease in revenue might mean reduction in salaries, and this the official bureaucracy dread to contemplate. So it is in the Government's interest to hold the ring by maintaining 'law and order' while the traders squeeze as much out of the natives as possible, and share the swag in the form of export duty.

Natives Barricade Soldiers

In Cape Coast, the headquarters of the nationalist movement, the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, African landlords who rented their shops to European firms, under pressure from the masses, have ordered their tenants to vacate. And to add to an already dangerous situation, the Central Government has announced that they intend to increase taxation in the form of water rates as from January, 1938. While the police were attempting to disperse a mass meeting held at Cape Coast to protest against the new tax at a time when the people are struggling for better economic conditions, fighting broke out between the police and the populace. Several civilians were wounded. The police, were, however, overpowered and the station attacked. According to unconfirmed report, the station was burned to the ground.

Similar disturbances have taken place at Saltpond, where the entire population declared a sympathetic strike with the people in Cape Coast and even set up barricades across the Cape Coast-

Saltpond highway to prevent the soldiers marching upon the Cape. Strikes have also broken out in the mining districts. At Prestea, the largest gold mining area on the Gold Coast, European officials had to do the work of native miners, to prevent the mines from flooding.

Goaded to Action

The situation on the Gold Coast is undoubtedly very serious, despite the attempt on the part of the colonial authorities to prevent the public knowing what is happening in Africa. In some parts of the country farmers have even threatened to burn down their cocoa trees and grow food crops, rather than continue to produce cocoa for European capitalists while they and their families are starving.

The Gold Coast people have repeatedly begged the Colonial Office to send out a Royal Commission, such as the one which recently visited the West Indies, to inquire into their grievances, but their appeals have been disregarded.

A little over a year ago two delegations, one representing the Provisional Council of Chiefs, headed by Sir Ofori Atta, and the other representing the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, came to England and interviewed four Secretaries of State for the Colonies—Lord Swinton, J. H. Thomas, Malcolm MacDonald and W. G. Ormsby-Gore. Each of these ministers refused to listen to the prayers of the natives, on the excuse that they had no real grievances.

The Africans, having exhausted all legitimate and peaceful methods of seeking redress and goaded into desperation, have resorted to direct action. Perhaps the Rip Van Winkles at Whitehall will now wake up.

When the Pitt County (N.C.) school board refused to appropriate money for a bus to transport Negro children to and from school, the parents went into their pockets and came out with \$1,019 in cash for the bus which is now in operation. It enables many more colored children to attend the **Ayden (N.C.) high school.**



One of the leaders of the strike of Gold Coast natives against the Cocoa barons is reported to be Nana Sir Ofori Atta, shown here in the center, paramount chief of the Akim Abuakwa, Gold Coast, West Africa, Knight of the British Empire, in his ceremonial robes and gold crown, with attendants