SESSION 5: BACKGROUND TO THE 1951 ELECTION

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We have in Sessions One to Four explored the definitions and relations between Democracy and Elections, rationale for elections, types of elections, forms of election management as well as theories of voter behavior. We shall in this and subsequent sessions apply these ideas to the Ghanaian situation by examining all elections in Ghana’s political history. We begin in this session (Session Five) with the background to electoral issues in the then Gold Coast (Ghana) up to 1951, when the first general election was held. We shall examine the structure of the British colonial administration, constitutional and electoral reforms from the 1920s to the 1940s, the formation of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and later the Convention People’s Party (CPP). We conclude by discussing the 1948 Riots, the Watson Commission and the Coussey Committee and their respective contributions to constitutional and electoral development of the then Gold Coast.
SESSION OUTLINE

The key topics to be covered in this session are:

• **Topic 1:** TERRITORIES OF GOLD COAST (GHANA)

• **Topic 2:** THE STRUCTURE OF THE BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN THE GOLD COAST

• **Topic 3:** CONSTITUTIONAL & ELECTORAL EVOLUTION IN THE GOLD COAST (1920s-1940s)

• **Topic 4:** THE ROLES OF THE 1948 RIOTS, THE WATSON COMMISSION & THE COUSSEY COMMITTEE TOWARDS THE 1951 GENERAL ELECTION


Learning objectives

At the end of the session, students should be able to:

• Understand clearly the four colonial territories that came together to form independent Ghana and their current regions of Ghana

• Explain the structure of the British Colonial Rule in the Gold Coast (Ghana)

• Discuss the constitutional and electoral evolution in the Gold Coast (Ghana) from the 1920s to the 1940s

• Appreciate the contributions of the 1948 riots, the Watson Commission and the Coussey Committee towards the first general election in 1951
TOPIC ONE

- TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST (GHANA)
Four broad colonial territories would be brought together to form independent Ghana at independence in 1957.

These were the Colony (Southern Ghana), Ashanti, the Northern Territories and Trans-Volta Togoland (British Togoland) each of which came under British rule at various times from the mid 19th Century (1850s).

The Colony covered present-day Western, Central, Greater Accra and Eastern Regions.

Ashanti covered present-day Ashanti & Brong Ahafo Regions.

The Northern Territories covered present-day Northern, Upper East and Upper West.

Trans-Volta Togoland (British Togoland) covered present-day Volta Region and the eastern portions of Northern and Upper East. British Togoland was formerly the Western part of German Togoland and was giving to Britain as an administering power after the defeat of Germany in World War I.
TOPIC TWO

• STRUCTURE OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE
The British Monarch (King or Queen) was represented in the Gold Coast by the Colonial Governor who had wide powers.

- He was assisted in the discharge of his duties by two bodies; the Executive Council (EC) and the Legislative Council (LC) and he presided over both of them.
- The EC which assisted the Governor in implementing policies, was until the 1940s composed of only Europeans.
- It is the EC that would evolve into the Cabinet by independence.

- The LC which advised the Governor on legislation would develop into Parliament by independence.
- The LC was composed of officials, who were top European officers in the colonial administration and unofficials who included Africans (Gold Coasters) and Europeans representing special interests such as mining and commerce (trade) but
- Until 1925, all of the members (officials & unofficials) were the direct appointees of the Governor.
STRUCTURE OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN THE GOLD COAST (CONT’D)

- Until 1946, the Governor ensured that there were always more officials than unofficials on the LC. This was known as the principle of official majority.
- In 1916 for example, Governor Hugh Clifford appointed 11 officials and nine unofficials and in 1925 Governor Gordon Guggisberg appointed 15 officials and 14 unofficials.
- The Governor was not bound by the advice of the EC or LC. He could accept or reject the advice.
- Also until 1946, the work of the EC & LC related only to the Colony.
- The Governor ruled the other territories by proclamation. This means, the Governor alone took decisions which he found necessary at any time.
- Gradually the wide powers of the Governor would be reduced and by independence he would have become a Governor-General with on ceremonial powers.
TOPIC THREE

• CONSTITUTIONAL & ELECTORAL EVOLUTION (1920S-1940s)
1925:
- Governor Gorden Guggisberg introduced a new constitution which retained the all-European EC and LC composed of 15 officials and 14 unofficials.
- The unofficials included three Gold Coasters representing the three municipal towns of Accra, Cape Coast & Sekondi-Takoradi; six chiefs representing the three Provincial Councils of Chiefs (PCCs), Western-1, Central-2 & Eastern-3; and five Europeans representing mining & commerce.
- The 3 municipal representatives were directly elected for the first time; the 6 chiefs were indirectly elected using the PCCs as electoral colleges, while the Europeans remained appointees of the Governor.
- Thus the elective principle was first introduced in 1925 and for the first time the nine Gold Coasters were not the direct appointees of the Governor.

1942
- The Governor appointed two Gold Coasters from the LC to become unofficial members of the EC:
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1946:
- Governor Allan Burns introduced a new constitution which provided for a 11-member EC (8 Europeans & 3 Gold Coasters) and LC comprising 6 officials and 24 unofficials
- The unofficials included 18 Gold Coasters: 5 directly elected to represent the 4 municipal towns of Accra-2, Cape Coast-1, Sekondi-Takoradi & Kumasi-1; 9 chiefs or their representatives for the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs (JPCC); and 4 chiefs or their representatives for the Asanteman Council of Chiefs (ACC); together with 6 Europeans appointed by the Governor for special interests
- For the first time there was unofficial majority of 24: 6 and African (Gold Coaster) majority of 18: 12. Also, for the first time Ashanti was included on the LC and brought under the jurisdiction of the EC but the Northern Territories were still excluded

1947:
- In August the first political party, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was formed demanding self-government by leaders including Paa George Grant, a timber merchant, J. B. Danquah, R. S. Blay, Edward Akufo-Addo, E. Ako Adjei, E.O. Lamptey (all lawyers) and William Ofori Atta (a graduate teacher). In December, Kwame Nkrumah would be brought from London to become General Secretary. He would later break away and form a new party.
TOPIC FOUR

• THE 1948 RIOTS, THE WATSON COMMISSION & THE COUSSEY COMMITTEE
1948

- In February 1948, there were riots after a month of boycott of European goods and the shooting of unarmed ex-servicemen at the Christianborg crossroads.
- Six leaders of UGCC were arrested and detained in the Northern Territories: Danquah, Lamptey, Ako Adjei, Akufo-Addo, Ofori Atta & Nkrumah. They became instant national heroes and nicknamed ‘The Big Six’ and the UGCC became a national party overnight.
- The colonial admission set up the Watson Commission to investigate the causes of the riots and offer recommendations.
- The Watson Commission found among other things that the Burns Constitution was outmoded at birth because in spite of some innovations it introduced it was still modeled on the 1925 Guggisberg Constitution of 21 years before, but the international system had drastically changed as a result of the Second World War.
- The Watson Commission recommended that the Gold Coaster should be allowed to draft a new constitution. This was revolutionary because that was the first time in British Colonial Africa that a colonized people were to do so.
1949:

- A 40-member all African (Gold Coaster) Committee, the Coussey Committee was set up to draft a new constitution. The Committee included five of the Big Six except Nkrumah and while the Committee sat the young members of the UGCC including K.A. Gbedemah & Kojo Botsio broke away in June to form the Convention People’s Party (CPP) demanding immediate self government. It was the Report of the Coussey Committee that would form the basis of the 1950/51 Constitution under which the 1951 election would be held. But the initial reaction of the newly-formed CPP was to describe it as ‘bogus and fraudulent’

- That same year (1949), the new Governor Arden-Clarke, appointed a member of the LC, Charles Emmanuel Quist, to preside over the sittings of the LC, a position which would evolved into Speaker.

1950

- The LC discussed and after some amendments adopted the Coussey Report as the new constitution variously called: the Coussey Constitution, the 1950 Constitution (after the year it was adopted), the 1951 Constitution (after the year it took effect) and Arden-Clarke Constitution after the Governor. That year the CPP organized a series of protests and sit-down strikes which it dubbed ‘Positive Action’ which landed several of its leaders in prison
REFERENCES


• Name the four broad territories that came together to form independent Ghana
• What was the difference between roles of the Executive Council and the Legislative Council?
• Explain the principle of official majority on the Legislative Council.
• Indicate any one fact to show that the Governor had wide powers
• Identify the two groups of Ghanaians that were appointed to the Legislative Council in 1916 by Governor Clifford
• Explain the significance of the 1925 Constitution in electoral terms?
• How were the municipal members of the Legislative Council chosen under the 1925 Guggisberg Constitution?
• How many Provincial Councils of Chiefs were created under the 1925 Guggisberg Constitution?
• What was the electoral role of the Provincial Councils of Chiefs under the 1925 Guggisberg Constitution?
• ‘The Burns Constitution of 1946 introduced the principle of unofficial majority”. Explain
• How many members of the Legislative Council were directly elected in 1946 under the Burns Constitution?
• Which two bodies elected the representatives of Chiefs to the Legislative Council under the 1946 Burns Constitution?
• How many members of the Legislative Council were directly elected in 1946 and for which seats?
• Which political party was formed in the Gold Coast in 1947?
• Identify any two leaders of that first political party.
• Give any one reason for the outbreak of the 1948 riots?
• Who became the ‘Big Six’ in the politics of the Gold Coast?
• Why was the Watson Commission appointed?
• Why did the Watson Commission describe the 1946 Constitution as ‘outmoded at birth?’
PRACTICE QUESTIONS (CONT’D)

• What major recommendation did the Watson made in relation to constitutional reform?
• Why was the Coussey Committee appointed?
• Who among the ‘Big Six’ was excluded from the Coussey Committee and what effect did that have on the politics of the Gold Coast?
• How was the Report of the Coussey Committee linked to the 1950 Constitution
• Which group describe the Coussey Committee Report as ‘bogus and fraudulent’?
• Why was the new constitution introduced in 1950 called the Arden-Clarke Constitution?