

ROBERT PINKNEY

Ghana under Military Rule 1966—1969

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When the soldiers and the police took over power in Ghana in the morning of 24 February 1966, they had very little idea about what they wanted to do with it. But one thing was certain: they did not want a government similar to the one they had overthrown; they wanted to abolish the one party state which Kwame Nkrumah had established and to de-emphasize political ideology. In short, the programme of the Ghana military amounted to little more than reaction against the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.) and Nkrumah. How did the soldiers go about their assumed mission of restoration? Did they meet with any difficulties or was it plain sailing? Were the police and soldiers easily accepted by the population who had up to then been used to civilian rule? These are some of the questions which Robert Pinkney, a former lecturer at Sekondi College, Ghana, tries to answer in this small but useful book.

The National Liberation Council (N.L.C.) which had been created by the officers to rule the country had no difficulty in establishing legitimacy. The members of the proscribed C.P.P. put up no resistance and indeed most of the former ministers were very anxious to disassociate themselves from the deposed President and his regime. Various sections of Ghanaian society were favourably disposed to the soldiers. According to the author, the middle class (by which he means all those who have received secondary education) got on well with the new regime because of certain class affinities with the soldiers and the police. This is very debatable. The criterion applied in determining class membership is too simple to be adequate in explaining the intricate social patterns of Ghana. There are far too many Ghanaians whom most of us would put into the middle class (for want of a better classification) but who never went to any secondary school. Moreover, the soldiers and the police had no fewer class affinities with the C.P.P. than with its opponents. The civil servants were of course happy to work with a government which seemed to be willing to listen to their advice and, what is more important, was less interested in effecting radical changes.

From the first day of assuming power, the N.L.C. never tired of declaring its intention to hand over power to a duly elected civilian government. The transition from military to civilian rule was facilitated by associating civilians with the running of the government. This gave an advantage to the civilians thus chosen by the N.L.C. The subsequent elections showed that many Ghanaians believed that those who helped the N.L.C. in governing the country were somehow entitled to continue to do so under a civilian regime.

Many readers would probably agree with Pinkney that the N.L.C. did a splendid job while it was in power. One may, however, wonder whether it is legitimate to judge soldiers by different standards from those one normally applies to politicians when both of them undertake the same task, i. e. the governing of a country.

Pinkney's book is written in a pleasant style and displays the traditional, one is almost tempted to say natural, British dislike of jargon and mystification. The book is further proof that when one really has something worthwhile to recount, one can do so in a simple language.

Kwame Opoku