PREFACE

IN THE COURSE of little more than a decade since the end of the Second World War there have been created in almost every territory of West Africa new representative bodies that have placed in African hands many of the powers formerly held by the colonial administrations. The conciliar structures which have been developed by Britain and France in West Africa have been largely based on the models which each country knew best—its own. In no sense can they be said to be natural extensions of indigenous political forms. The national and regional legislative houses of Nigeria, the territorial assemblies, and the *grands conseils* of French Africa had no traditional counterparts simply because the administrative units over which they were given jurisdiction were largely creations of the European powers. The new units of local representative government in Southern Nigeria, on the other hand, supplanted a system of local administration in which strenuous efforts had been made to preserve the framework of traditional political authority.

This book is a study of some of these new representative institutions, of their operation, and of the problems which have been encountered in the integration of popularly elected bodies into communities which had little appreciation of their real functions and which were not in many cases fully prepared to accept their authority. Representative government in the Western sense was imposed by fiat from above (although in response to the demands of an educated minority) but it could only operate with the consent of the governed. Securing the consent and the participation of the mass of the people has been a slow and often painful process, particularly in areas where legitimization of the new system was actively combated by the tribal authorities.

Acceptance of the conciliar forms could be brought about not by law or by force but only by persuasion. The persuaders have been the European administrators and the educated political leadership, working through the political party organizations. In Southern Nigeria the administrative officer has been forced to play an indirect role in creating popular support for the elected councils since he is, in theory at least, only a guide and adviser. Although the French administrative officer's position has not been changed directly by the existence of the territorial assemblies, his former authority has been tempered by the presence of an elected member of the assembly in his area and he has been forced to compromise with the new political forces created by local representation. The political parties have everywhere been active in applying pressure to the colonial administrations for the extension of local representative systems. And they have found fertile fields for their activities in the local councils; party struggles in the councils are helping to develop local party organizations. In French Africa the parties have perforce concentrated much of their efforts on the territorial assemblies as mechanisms for teaching the voters the meaning of the representative system.

But during the growth of the secular democratic organs there has continued to exist traditional authority, varying in its power from area to area, depending on the strength of local adherence to the indigenous political structure. One of the most serious problems confronting the local representatives in Nigeria has been that of securing the cooperation (or at least the neutrality) of the chief and his councilors. Where the traditional heads of the community have been genuinely integrated into the conciliar structure, the task of the councils has been made immeasurably easier; where there has been strong opposition, popular representation has often become only an empty shell. The following quotation, while it refers specifically to Ghana, illustrates a situation which finds a counterpart in many other areas of West Africa:

> Cousin against cousin, an old man on a gilded throne and a young man in a swivel chair are struggling for supremacy over the sacred stool of Akim Abuakwa.
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> At his capital in Kibi the Paramount Chief sits amid the trappings of his ancient office, a leopard skin under his feet and a self-winding watch

on his arm, vowing to defend his traditional powers and cling to the leadership of his people.

In his office at Accra the Minister of Local Government hunches over a desk piled with papers, insisting that the old Omanhene must keep out of politics and give way to the new Ghana of mass movements and ballot-box democracy.[1]

Today the people of West Africa, in the midst of a social and economic revolution, have been required to participate in the operation of political bodies designed for an entirely different environment, while those institutions to which their loyalties have been directed in the past are often ignored. The economic individualism arising from the technological revolution of the twentieth century has already put an almost unbearable strain on the fabric of traditional society; the reluctance of many Africans to accept the local representative organs is often a reflection of their desire to retain some element of stability based on tribal authority, in a world which in other ways is disintegrating before their eyes.

The chief concern of this study, then, is to describe the structure of local representation and to analyze its operation in the light of the influences exerted on it by the traditional systems on the one hand and, on the other, by the pressures of modern Western political and administrative practices as they are illustrated by the political parties and the European administrator.

Because of their differing approaches to the problem of self-government and ultimate independence in West Africa, Britain and France have not attached equal importance to the development of purely local representation. Since 1950, a full-scale conciliar structure extending down to the level of the bush village has been brought into existence in Southern Nigeria. In French Africa, however, with the exception of some of the larger municipalities, popular representation has virtually everywhere ended at the level of the territorial assembly. In the hierarchy of elected bodies it is evident that, in terms of many of its functions, the territorial assembly is much more nearly comparable to a regional legislature in Nigeria than to, say, a county council in Nigeria. Although the territorial assembly was, particularly in the early period of its existence, in reality little more

[1] Richard P. Hunt, New York *Times*, October 11, 1957.

than the overseas counterpart of a French *conseil de département,* the rapid growth of the demand for local autonomy had by 1956 virtually eliminated all traces of this local council element. But the comparison in the present study between the assemblies and the Nigerian local councils lies not primarily in their respective roles as organs of government but in the roles they have played as the lowest common denominators of the representative system in their respective territories. It was through the assemblies in French territory and through the local councils in Nigeria that the opportunity for expression of political opinion was given at a level meaningful to the average voter. The ability to vote in the election of a deputy to sit in Paris carried almost as little significance for the great mass of the new African voters in French Africa as did, at first, the vote for a member of the central legislature to the man in the bush in Nigeria. When one's horizon is bounded by the next village or at most by the nearest large town, Lagos is as far away as Paris.

The problems encountered in establishing local representation, whether the form was a district council, a *commission municipale,* or a territorial assembly, were in many respects similar. While the powers of an assembly were obviously substantially greater than those of a council, the voter had still to learn in both cases how to choose a councilor or an assemblyman who would best represent his interests. The assemblies and the councils both created new roles of prestige and distinction in the community, and the new authority of these elected representatives had to be reconciled with the existing pattern of indigenous authority. Problems of integration and of conflict arose as a consequence of the activities which the new representative institutions were required to perform, at whatever levels they existed. We are concerned here with the process by which the resolution of these problems has been sought in two colonial areas in which a widely differing interpretation has been placed on the continuing value of indigenous political structures.

A word must be said about the time sequence of this study. Political change is taking place so rapidly in West Africa that it becomes virtually impossible to analyze the current situation except on a day-to-day basis. The field research for the present work was undertaken in West Africa in 1954 and 1955; most of the data upon which

the analysis is based are drawn from observations and interviews conducted during this period. It is inevitable that some aspects of the problems dealt with will have changed, although it is hoped that in the broader picture the judgments made remain valid. An effort has been made to take into account any major structural changes in local government by reference to documentary sources up to the end of 1956. In particular, the sweeping changes made in French Africa by the *Loi cadre* have of necessity been dealt with only in the most general fashion; the full effects of the decrees taken under the law cannot yet be estimated, but it is clear that by them the entire picture of local government in French Africa will be altered.

I can only hope to acknowledge here my debt to a few of the many people who have helped me in the preparation of this study. To Columbia University and to the Rockefeller Foundation I owe thanks for the grants which permitted me to undertake the field research. To Mr. Kenneth Robinson, formerly of Nuffield College, Oxford, and to the staff of the Institute of Colonial Studies at Oxford, as well as to officials of the Colonial Office, I am deeply grateful for guidance in documentation and for their friendly counsel. My work in Paris was greatly facilitated by the assistance of the staff of the Ecole de la France d'Outre Mer, the Institut des Hautes Etudes Musulmanes, and by the members of the secretariat of the Ministry of Overseas France.

To many officials of government in Nigeria and the territorial capitals of West Africa, the Cameroons, and French Equatorial Africa I am greatly indebted both for the warmth of their hospitality and for their advice. The district officers, *commandants de cercle,* and *chefs de région* who were prepared not only to answer endless questions but to put at my disposal files of invaluable information on local administration will understand that my gratitude for their help is no less great because they must remain anonymous. Any of them who may read this book may well recognize some of the opinions they expressed to me.

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