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# Ghana experiments with civic education

CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

AIMS TO INCULCATE  
DEMOCRATIC VALUES

By Fred M. Hayward

Soon after the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, General J. A. Ankrah announced: "The National Liberation Council has imposed a ban on all party-political activities so that we can concentrate fully on the solution of the most pressing national problems . . .

"This does not, however, imply that the Council intends to remain in power indefinitely. At the opportune time, the country will revert to civilian rule, and the Council is taking appropriate steps to prepare the ground for this."

A statement like so many others we have heard: a coup to oust a corrupt, wasteful and repressive government; military action in the name of the people; a ban on political activity; a promise to return to civilian rule when certain unspecified conditions are met. Given past experience one might well have been skeptical. What "appropriate steps" were being taken? What did the National Liberation

Council do to prepare the country for civilian rule?

In fact, unlike most other military regimes which have made similar promises, the National Liberation Council (NLC) actively sought to prepare the way for a non-military government. The initial steps were not unusual. The NLC directed its attention to what were held to be the major problems of the Nkrumah regime—the economy, corruption and oppression. The Ministry of Information and Department of Social Welfare sent speaker trucks into the country to transmit the messages of the NLC, especially the justification of the coup. These agencies, however, were geared to passing along information. How were men to be educated and re-educated to insure that the return to civilian rule would not lead to a rerun of the same familiar scenario?

Both the NLC and a number of non-military leaders felt that some special effort was necessary, and it was decided that it should be undertaken by a new agency called the Centre for Civic Education (CCE). In inaugurating the Centre on June 7,

1967, General Ankrah noted, "We are fully convinced that, with the initiation of nationwide civic education as the solid bed-rock in our society, we can confidently look forward to a new civilian government in which elections will be held in a clean and free atmosphere without any victimization, violence and personal vindictiveness; in which the government will realize its limitations and in which the rights and privileges of the people shall be guaranteed."

The CCE was not a creation inspired solely by the NLC. Its inception was in part a consequence of the loss of confidence, the frustration and extreme national self-criticism of the post-Nkrumah period. It was fostered by the assumption that the excesses of the Nkrumah regime were not primarily the consequence of one man's power, but the result of actions which were approved or tolerated by substantial portions of the populace over a long period of time. Among those influential in establishing the CCE was Dr. K. A. Busia, former leader of the opposition, the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Centre and currently Prime Minister.

The CCE was envisaged as providing the nucleus for a new political order and a moral basis for democracy. It was to reintegrate and unify the society, to teach tolerance and respect for political ideas, to prepare the groundwork for constructive opposition as well as an understanding of the limits of government power and authority. It was to teach men to evaluate other men as leaders, to be aware of their responsibilities to government as well as their rights as citizens so that no unscrupulous official could take advantage of them. Furthermore, the Centre was to be removed from politics—a neutral vehicle for education, not an agent of any government or political grouping. This was a formidable task.

As far as I know, the CCE does not have an analogous organization in Africa. Nor is there anything like it in the United States or Great Britain. It is a quasi-government agency of political education which is designed to have a high degree of autonomy from national political control, and largely succeeds in having that autonomy. It is not like the League of

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Women Voters or the partisan Americans for Democratic Action, for example, in that it neither lobbies nor takes a stand on particular candidates or issues and its actions (although utilizing volunteers) are almost entirely dependent on a professional quasi-government staff. Its similarity rests solely in a commitment to honest, efficient democratic government. In West Germany somewhat similar agencies were set up during the period of de-nazification under military rule and continue at the state level as State Centers for Political Education. The staff grew slowly, but before the elections in 1969 there were close to sixty full-time persons working in the field plus a national administrative staff in Accra. In addition, during the pre-election period almost 200 students were hired to help explain the voting process. The initial staff, most of whom were former teachers, was drawn almost exclusively from other government agencies and organizations.

Most of the funds for the Centre came from the government, although there were those in the CCE who wanted (unrealistically I think) to see it financed by volunteer contributions. Some external funds were secured—\$2,000 from the International Association for Cultural Freedom, and over a period of years, several hundred thousand dollars from the West German trade-union supported Friedrich-Ebert Foundation. A realistic estimate of the cost of the program would be around \$700,000. The staff were neither civil service nor private. Formalization of their status was among the problems being considered during 1970-71.

Some technical help was sought in West Germany, Great Britain and the United States. The Friedrich-Ebert Foundation supplied two technicians, vehicles, visual aids, office equipment and other aid. Dr. Busia and others in the Centre felt that they had much to learn from West Germany. As Dr. Busia expressed it at a seminar on "Civic Education for Democracy" in 1968, "... our country, like theirs, has suffered from rulers inebriated with the heady wine of power. Our camps, detentions and tortures were on a smaller scale, only because our rulers did not possess the apparatus

of torture available to the rulers of Germany" ... He continues, "... we are attempting, like Germany did after Hitler, to make democracy and development the twin pillars of our national reconstruction."

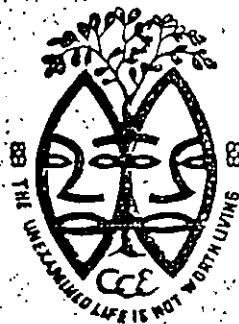
What kinds of programs would facilitate civic education? The purely informational approach was rejected. Two types of programs emerged.

past political difficulties. Some of these individuals were also asked to serve on Centre advisory committees in each of the regions.

The second and major effort of the CCE was directed at the population as a whole. There programs included a combination of presentations and discussion with a great deal of time devoted to questions from the people

## CENTRE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

### LOCAL COUNCIL



*Ghanaian civic education poster.*

There was an effort to work intensively with small groups—especially active educated citizens. It was hoped that they would help others to understand the messages of the Centre and also help the Centre develop an effective program. These groups were encouraged to think about the requirements of democracy and civilian rule and, equally important, reasons for

and discussion of past and present political problems. Civic education was to be participatory.

The initial projects of the Centre were devoted to national unity—an attack on "tribalism" and regionalism and a call for tolerance and mutual respect. There is little question that the Nkrumah regime had left many people feeling that their ethnic group

and their region had been discriminated against. As a result, extensive apathy and cynicism about politics compounded widespread fear of government. In many areas there was little enthusiasm for elections and voter registration was viewed with suspicion. In one part of the Eastern Region alone, villagers in at least four areas had decided not to register or go to the polls. One typical example of the cynicism was expressed by a villager in response to a CCE talk, "Selling Your Vote is Selling Your Freedom." The villager asked: "Why shouldn't I take money from the candidate when he comes to ask for my vote? I am poor and probably will never see him again, except perhaps if another election comes along." It was within this context that the Centre began its programs of civic education.

In addition to the effort to bring about national unity, the CCE sought to explain the role of citizens in a democratic political process and to encourage discussion of values and ideas to be embodied in the new constitution and in procedures for returning to civilian rule. A number of topics served as a basis for meetings and discussions throughout the country. A sample of the topics gives some idea of the range of themes covered: "Tolerance and Mutual Respect in Party Politics," "You Make Politics Dirty or Clean," "We Need Party Politics," "Give and Take, the Golden Rule of Politics," "The MP and the Voter," "Your Role in Changing Ghana," "Party Politics and You," "The Proposed Constitution," and "Party Politics and Non-violence." These programs seem to have been very successful in most cases, especially in the rural areas, where crowds were larger and interest greater than in the cities.

During the pre-election period CCE field workers encouraged voter registration, discussed the nature and methods of campaigning and voting and tried to facilitate effective, peaceful competition for offices. They were not formally involved in voting procedures. While there were a few CCE officials who carried on partisan political activities, this usually occurred in areas where "their" party was clearly dominant, and if caught

by national CCE officials they were reprimanded or dismissed. Officials of the Centre felt that the greatest measure of their success has been the smoothness and peacefulness of the elections for which they argue (I think justifiably in many cases) they were to a major degree responsible. During the pre-election period when the CCE went around the country explaining the voting process, student summer employees alone spoke to more than 500,000 people.

One of the most successful features of the several dozen Centre programs which I observed was the question-and-answer sessions which were part of every program. Most of the questions dealt with government-related problems: what could they do when a policeman was taking advantage of them, when a lumberman refused to help repair a road built with communal labor which his trucks used and damaged, when they wanted help with a polluted water system, when the local council was cheating them? The candor and concern shown by Centre officials in answering these questions and suggesting remedies was extremely impressive to both observer and participant. In cases where Centre field workers found instances of extreme abuse or hardship they often went to local officials to seek government action.

There were other types of CCE programs which were exciting. They had a puppet van which went from village to village with lively shows illustrating messages about good government. Villagers jeered the corrupt officials, the drunken policeman, and cheered and clapped for the heroes and heroines—the honest politicians and the good citizens. The Centre was also starting a sort of Hyde Park corner, for political discussions in the cities, and small civic clubs. While some of these clubs were only minimally organized, others were very active and made their imprint on local politics.

Following the 1969 elections the CCE embarked on a number of other ambitious projects. Its first major effort was based on the theme "Your Political Opponent is not Your Enemy"—an attempt at national reconciliation. Evidence of the success of the CCE was indicated by the number of

requests that organizers received to visit a town or village in order to reconcile factions still split and angry about those who had supported or failed to support a particular candidate.

The issue of the Centre's "neutrality" has been a serious problem. With the establishment of political parties many people began to confuse the Centre with a political party. Some individuals (often whole villages) who had decided to support one of the existing political parties did not want to listen to programs of the CCE because they thought the Centre was another political party. Others thought the CCE was synonymous with, or partial to the Progress Party, eventual winner in the 1969 elections. (See *Africa Report*, "Ghanaian Politics: The Elections and After," March 1970) Part of this confusion was due to the fact that Dr. Busia, who had been Chairman of the CCE, resigned to become a founder of the Progress Party (PP). In areas where other political parties had major support, the field workers of the Centre often had to spend a good deal of time trying to convince people that the Centre was non-partisan—often without much success.

While there is no question that the majority of those working for the CCE were sympathetic to the Progress Party, most of them were remarkably neutral. At least four employees resigned to run for office or to support candidates—all four were active in the Progress Party. Several district organizers who did not resign were removed for political activities, one for working for the National Alliance of Liberals (NAL, the other major party), one for organizing dancers for a PP rally.

The success of the CCE is attributable primarily to the high quality of its field personnel. Most of them worked in areas where they had lived or grown up. Many had experience in political detention under Nkrumah or had been victims of political repression. Almost all were willing to work long hours, walk to remote villages, travel in mammy wagons on hot and dusty roads, argue and discuss for hours with those who were interested. Unlike a good many organizations in Ghana which are elitist and whose

members frequently talk about and subsequently forget "our poor, unfortunate, illiterate brethren," the majority of CCE field workers were dedicated to communicating with the masses of uneducated Ghanaians.

Despite striking successes, the scope of the impact of the CCE staff was limited by a number of difficulties. The staff was too small. An organizer in the Volta Region had 42 traditional areas to cover (about 300 villages) and had managed to cover 35 of them in six months. In his 18 months on the job there were some villages he had not reached at all. One of the most impressive organizers in the Northern Region had the largest territory, a population of 118,000 spread over 14,000 square miles, about three times the size of Connecticut). His primary means of transportation was a rented bicycle.

For a brief period after the establishment of the Second Republic in 1969, the CCE seemed to flounder. There was confusion about its aims, and concern about terms of service since most of the staff was still "on loan" from other institutions and agencies. Some thought that with the victory of the Progress Party, Dr. Busia would dissolve the CCE or turn it into a propaganda organ of the government. This did not transpire. He persuaded a somewhat reluctant Dr. B. D. G. Folson, a bright and energetic Ghanaian political scientist at the University of Ghana, to become Executive Director of the Centre. Folson moved to improve the central organization (in particular the staffing, accounting and program sections), to put staff positions on a permanent basis, to get an adequate government subsidy, and reasserted the Centre's neutrality. He also undertook a vigorous effort to upgrade the stature of the Centre's programs, traveling to almost every district in the country and launching an impressive program on local government.

Despite the pre-election successes and Mr. Folson's concerted efforts, it will be difficult for the Centre to continue as it has in the past without strong support and defense from the Prime Minister and other Government officials. Shortly after the Progress Party assumed office, one Regional Chief Executive suggested that

the government was relying on the CCE for the "correct interpretation" and "implementation" of its policies. The CCE Regional Organizer replied that as long as the PP operated in a proper democratic fashion it would have full cooperation from the CCE. He warned, however, that if the Progress Party deviated from these policies the CCE would be obliged to criticize such deviations and would emphasize the proper way to act in keeping with democratic ideals. It takes a strong commitment to democracy to prevent government officials from succumbing to the temptation to throttle candor of that kind.

Continuing its attack on mismanagement, begun after the coup, the Centre for Civic Education has fo-

infuriated many local council members, both PP and non-PP. The outcome of pressures on the CCE will be very important, for should the Centre or its field workers be stifled or intimidated, the already widespread popular cynicism towards politics will make it even more difficult to restore public confidence in government.

The long term success or failure of the CCE rests in part on its ability to continue as a non-partisan agency working to teach people their rights as well as their obligations. Having made a substantial start in laying the basic groundwork for democracy, perhaps even more important, CCE success depends on the ability of the present government to operate in a democratic fashion, respecting its op-



cus on corrupt and incompetent officials—especially the historically corrupt and frequently mismanaged local councils—regardless of the political party in control. Although this objectivity is appreciated by those attending CCE mass meetings, it has certain long-run costs to the CCE. It is inevitable that some of those criticized are members of the governing Progress Party. As a consequence, the Centre is now being criticized not only by those who feel that it is an arm of the Progress Party, but by some PP members who feel that an agency of the government should not criticize the party in power. The CCE poster campaign against corruption

ponents, and avoiding the temptation to use its power to silence those who cause it embarrassment. It is fashionable to suggest that the opposition should respect the government and be "constructive" in its criticisms. I share that view, but my experience in both Africa and the United States leads me to feel that the danger lies less in a free opposition than in a repressive government.

The Centre for Civic Education represents an extremely interesting and innovative experiment in civic education, and its example has much to offer other countries interested in significant public participation in politics.