

Commentary

The All African People's Congress (AAPC) called by Kwame Nkrumah -- and George Padmore

Marika Sherwood

Background

George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah began to work together in London in 1945. Their relationships continued when Nkrumah returned home. As the few released MI5 files reveal, Nkrumah discussed his aims, his policies, his plans with Padmore. This commentary gives an outline of Padmore's life and activism. At Nkrumah's request, Padmore was involved with the organising of the Congress of Independent African States, and then with the All-African Peoples Conference. This second conference was to be a conference of *people*, not presidents/prime ministers. Held in Accra in December 1958, it was attended by hundreds of people, and must have been much more reliant on Padmore, as he had been in contact the political activists around the world for many years. Sadly, Padmore's contribution to these conferences, and much else, have not been recognised. Is this partly because we don't really know enough? The British government has released very few files on him and not all have been preserved in Ghana.

Introduction

Kwame Nkrumah had begun to talk about the need for West Africa, and then African unity while he was a student in the United States (Sherwood 1996 & 2014). He moved to London in 1945, planning to finish his university education there. He had met C.L.R. James while he was in the USA and James introduced him to his colleague/fellow Trinidadian activist, George Padmore. Padmore, had just begun to organise a Pan-African Congress and appointed Nkrumah as one of the organisers. (Sherwood 2019: 42).

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963. It was 'born', I would argue, in Accra in 1958, at two conferences, both held in 1958: The Conference of Independent African States and the All-African Peoples' Conference. How could newly independent Ghana call these conferences? It might have been relatively easy to work out how to contact the heads of independent states, but how would Kwame Nkrumah know whom to invite to a 'Peoples' conference? After all, communication was just about impossible between the different countries in the huge continent of Africa, where some 2,000 languages were spoken. In 1958 only eight countries were free; the rest were ruled by colonial masters. Nkrumah needed help.

So, who was George Padmore?

How come this Trinidadian living in England was organising a conference there to unite Africans? Padmore, studying in the USA, had joined the Communist Party. In 1929, the Party, impressed by all his journalism sent him to Moscow where he was appointed editor of a new journal the Negro Worker. His first book, the Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers was published in 1931. As he had done in the USA, he addressed many meetings, in Moscow and elsewhere in Europe. So his experience and range of contacts grew and grew. This is confirmed by his biographers: Leslie James notes that as the Negro Worker "editor he received copious correspondence... by the end of 1932 he could boast a vast network of individuals and organizations across Africa, the United States, the West Indies, Britain, and, to a lesser extent, Latin America". James Hooker, Padmore's first biographer, states that "his net expanded until it held about 4,000 people throughout the colonial world" (James, 2015: 25, 26; Hooker, 1967: 26).

In 1933 Padmore resigned from the Party, moved to England, met with a number of other ex-communists, and became involved with C.L.R. James, one of the founders of the International African Friends of Abyssinia/Ethiopia to campaign against the Italian invasions of that independent country. As we know, IAFA/E couldn't prevent the conquest. James soon left for the USA. Padmore, with other IAFA/E activists transformed the organisation into the International African Service Bureau (IASB). This aimed to "enlighten public opinion" about conditions in the colonies and to "agitate for democratic rights and constitutional reforms".

The British government has withheld almost all its papers on Padmore, who would have been under surveillance for most of his life. So, it is only from the letterhead of an IASB letter I have found, dated 7 January 1938, that we learn that the IASB had six officers: three, including Padmore (the chair), are West Indians; three are Africans. On the Executive Committee there were eight West Africans, one Ethiopian, one Sudanese, one South African and three West Indians. The twenty Patrons included eight MPs and an African American.

The IASB was very busy: it convened and attended meetings, wrote articles distributed broadly, as were its pamphlets and newsletters/newspapers. However, the newspapers had brief lives – or changed their name, probably to avoid confiscation by colonial governments. Beginning in July 1937, the first paper was Africa and the World; it was followed in October/November by the African Sentinel, "a Journal devoted to the interest of Africans and peoples of African descent, all over the world". The editor was Wallace Johnson, Organising Secretary, West

African Youth League, and General Secretary, International African Service Bureau. The articles were far-ranging and included regular sections on 'In the Colonial Empire'. The last issue was for March/April 1938. Then came the International African Opinion, again with a broad range of articles, covering issues in Africa, the West Indies, the USA and the UK. The final article in the last issue I have, February–March 1939, is 'A Plea for Negro Self-Government', by T.R. Makonnen (who also emigrated to Ghana and became very active.) It is important to note that in all issues of these newspapers only some authors' and editors' names are given. The IASB would have learned from the confiscation of its newspapers that they were deemed to be what today would be called 'a threat' to the colonial governments. So naturally some writers would not have wanted to be added to the undoubted government list of 'threats'.¹

Padmore continued writing. His book *How Britain Rules Africa* was published in 1936. He had innumerable articles published in newspapers and journals around the world. In the UK he spoke at many meetings. These make clear that he had maintained his contacts around the 'Black' world, especially with activists. However, during World War II this was probably impossible. The Emergency Powers Defence Act of 1939 just about stopped the activities of the IASB and "made Padmore's primary activity, writing, much more difficult.... (he) met frequently with other colonial dissidents in London", according to biographer Leslie James (James, 2015: 51). Early in 1945 the IASB began to plan a Pan-African conference.

Nkrumah and Padmore, England, 1945-7

At C.L.R. James' request, in 1945 George Padmore met the student Kwame Nkrumah on his arrival in England from the USA. Nkrumah himself had been politically active while studying in the USA, and had some experience of publishing (Sherwood 2015;1996). It is hardly surprising that two men got along very well indeed. Nkrumah reports that "George Padmore and I became joint secretaries of the Organisation Committee [of the Pan-African Congress] and we worked night and day in George's flat... We despatched hundreds of letters to the various organisations throughout Africa and the West Indies explaining the aims of the Congress and the political tactics that should be adopted to achieve liberation in the colonies" (Nkrumah 1957: 52). Following the Congress Nkrumah was appointed Associate Editor of the new journal, *Pan Africa*, issued by the newly formed Pan-African Federation.

Given their relationship, undoubtedly Nkrumah learned much from Padmore from 'day one,' so to speak. There was probably no-one else in the world who knew so much about Africa and the colonies, who knew so many political activists, who had so much experience of writing and publishing material espousing independence and anti-racism. African activists also used Padmore: for example, in 1947 Nnamdi Azikiwe appointed him press secretary to the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons visiting London to protest against the new constitution imposed on Nigeria.

Padmore's name would have become well known in the Gold Coast (and many other colonies) by those who could afford to buy (and read), or listened to friends reading newspapers to them. The *Gold Coast Observer* added 'our London Correspondent' to Padmore's name as the author of an article in its 16 May 1947 issue. The earliest article I have by him in the *Ashanti Pioneer* is in the 16 July 1947 issue. I have not been able to discover for how many West African or Indian or West Indian newspapers Padmore was their 'London Correspondent' in those years. And I must emphasise that I have not had access to all the issues of the newspapers noted here.

Nkrumah also became very active in the UK, probably at least partly resulting from introductions to organisations by Padmore. In 1946 with Ashie Nikoi, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, Kojo Botsio, Bankole Awoonor-Renner and Bankole Akpata he founded the West African National Secretariat, to campaign for African unity and independence. WANS published its own newspaper, *The New African*. (Sherwood 2020). In 1947 Kwame Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast.

Nkrumah and Padmore, London and the Gold Coast, 1951- 1953

In 1951 the Convention People's Party won the very first general election and Kwame Nkrumah was invited to form a government for the Gold Coast. In May that year Lincoln University, where he had studied, advised him that the University's Trustees had agreed to confer a Doctor of Laws on him; in June 1951 he had to go there to receive it. Nkrumah's flight stopped at London. He reports that "in the reception hall a familiar figure walked up – George Padmore. It was a happy reunion... we went to George's flat, where, seated around the old kitchen table, we related our activities..." On his return, "George Padmore and a few African students were waiting for us" (Nkrumah 1957: 158, 167). From this it would appear that Nkrumah and Padmore had remained in contact with each other.

Nkrumah invited Padmore to visit the Gold Coast in January 1951, "in order to chronicle the remarkable history of postwar events" (Hooker 1967: 114).

The Gold Coast Police's 'Special Branch Summary, July 1951' begins with "On 1 July George Padmore arrived by air from the UK..." (TNA: KV2/1850, 'Kwame Nkrumah', letter dated 15/8/1951).

He had been invited back to "witness Nkrumah's installation as Leader of Government business at the reopening of the Legislative Council" (Hooker 1957:115). Padmore did much more than 'witness'; it was reported that he was to "tour the country to gain first-hand information" (*Ashanti Pioneer*, 3 July 1951). Padmore's recent biographer reports that he "covered the aftermath of the colony's first elections for international newspapers, and helped organize a number of key administrative units for Nkrumah's party, the CPP... helped organize the CPP

¹ See, for example, TNA: CO537/4299 and /4300, 'Security: undesirable publications'.

headquarters, the editorial office of the Accra Evening News, and even the new Department of Foreign Affairs. He created a study syllabus for the Department's members and drafted an outline of diplomatic procedure for them" (James 2015:132).

As noted in the local papers, for example the Evening News which also published articles by him, Padmore travelled around the country and gave many talks, especially to the young members of the CPP. He "thrilled Accra audience at the Royal Cinema... powerful historical speech, 'The African and the colonial struggle'... 3000 there...", according to the Ashanti Pioneer, on 5th July.

It is important to note here that Padmore, on whom almost no papers have been released by the British government, is reported on again and again in the few released MI5 files on Nkrumah. There is an undated list of 'Correspondence relating to Padmore', in the MI5 file on Nkrumah, KV2/1850 (PF39, 537), with references to 59 letters. The handwritten date at the bottom is 21/11/1951. It is clear from these surveillance files on Nkrumah that both his and Padmore's mail was intercepted. It must be noted here that Nkrumah and Padmore – and others – aware of this interception, often used false names or other people's addresses, but these were given to MI5 officers by informants, who are usually referred to as 'SWIFT' in the MI5 reports. The released files on Nkrumah stop in August 1953, and many pages have been withheld.

Just how close the two men were is indicated by these MI5 files on Nkrumah. From these we learn that the two men corresponded with each other constantly, discussing Nkrumah's political plans. To provide just one example of topics discussed: in a report dated 18 October 1952, the West Africa Security Office reports to the Director General of MI5 that Padmore and Nkrumah had been discussing what the request for constitutional changes should include, and how Nkrumah should 'handle the chiefs'.²

MI5 sent a very long report on Padmore to the Colonial office on 8 February 1952; below are glimpses of this report which indicate the close relationship between the two men:

#35: 'In March, 1951, Padmore was known to be discussing with Kwame Nkrumah the possibility of holding a Pan-African Conference in the Gold Coast...'

#38: 'Padmore is known to have been in touch with Nkrumah and his associates since 1945 and to have been offering political guidance to the C.P.P. since the beginning of 1950.'

#39: 'It is apparent that... the CPP looked to Padmore for political guidance in all matters of importance...'³

Some MI5 files on Kojo Botsio have also been released. These include, for example, a 15 December 1950 report from 'CHEST', that Botsio is in touch with Padmore. The Director General of MI5 notes on 6 March 1951 that "Nkrumah's speech on release from prison accepted much of the advice given to the CPP by Padmore... It will be of interest to see how the link between the CPP and Padmore develops in the future'. (TNA: KV2/1915 and 1916: Kojo Botsio). Given what we learn from these surveillance files, the link was very strong indeed.

Padmore 1954-7

On his return to London, Padmore finished writing what became *The Gold Coast Revolution*, published in London in 1953. Then, though working on his next book, *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (published in 1956) must have taken up much of his time, Padmore continued writing articles for many newspapers, including those noted above and others in many parts of Africa. We can presume that he continued his discussions with Kwame Nkrumah, but the government has released no files on this. However, according to Padmore's biographer Leslie James, Joe Appiah, then in London, was "one of the key links between Padmore and the CPP... The two collaborated closely, reading through drafts of party documents and the constitution that Nkrumah sent them" (James 2015: 150).

Nkrumah and Padmore, Accra, 1957 - 1958

Nkrumah invited George Padmore to attend the Independence ceremonies on 6 March 1957. Apparently almost immediately afterwards Nkrumah appointed him as his Adviser on African Affairs. So Padmore, soon joined by his partner Dorothy Pizer, settled in Accra. Nkrumah now created the Bureau of African Affairs to 'house' his Adviser and provide him with an office and staff. It reported directly to Kwame Nkrumah and was quite separate from the official Ministry of External Affairs. The Bureau worked closely with Nkrumah on African unity and independence issues (James 2015: 169–172).

Apart from much else, they began to plan what became the Conference of Independent African States (CIAS). Nkrumah sent a delegation, headed by his old friend Ako Adjei, 'to discuss arrangements' with the ambassadors of the seven already independent states (*The Times*, 6/2/1958,p.7).

Then, with Ako Adjei and Kofi Baako, Padmore visited these states' capital cities. Professor St.Clair Drake reports that on their return to Accra it became "Padmore's job to help work out a program on non-violent "Positive Action" and "Tactical Action" on a continent wide scale...

2 TNA: KV2/1850, folio 251a; some of the reports are noted in the Colonial Political Intelligence Summaries, in TNA: CO968/265 and 266.

3 TNA: 968/1194, 'Secret' report on Padmore sent to the Colonial Office by MI5, 8 February 1952. The CO is told that 'copies have been sent to all our representatives in Africa'. This file on Padmore 1952–3 was released in 2019; it is a bit of a mess – have some pages been withheld?

the Conference was arranged under [Padmore's] personal guidance" (Drake 1958: 5–9).⁴ Padmore himself noted that "the arrangements... are largely in my hands". Reported in the journal *West Africa* on 26 April was the observation that Padmore "has been prominent behind the scenes" (p.387). In his statement at the Conference, Nkrumah said that this is "the first time in history that representative of independent sovereign States in Africa are meeting together with the aim of forging closer links of friendship, brotherhood, co-operation and solidarity" (Adi 2018: 144).

After the Conference, E.K. Dadson, the Government Chief Whip, Krobo Edusei, the Minister of the Interior, and Padmore accompanied Prime Minister Nkrumah on his month-long 'goodwill' visit to the seven states which had sent representatives to the CIAS. Their aim was to "explore steps to implement resolutions taken at the conference", according to *The Times*, 30 May. But it was only Padmore who would have known and/or been acquainted with activists in those countries, but perhaps not with their heads of state. He was, according to Kwame Nkrumah, "the life of our party" (Sherwood 2009: 174–5).

According to Professor Drake, Padmore served as Nkrumah's 'roving ambassador' for both the CIAS, and the later AAPC (Drake 1958: 6).

I think it is important to note the interest of the USA in the CIAS. The Department of State reported of the "fear of intemperate resolutions in condemnation of colonial powers and of the policies of the West... Would have been embarrassing to us and our allies... We encouraged President Tubman to head his country's delegates... believed he would exercise a moderating influence... At the conclusion of the conference... it was clear that President Tubman had in fact been of those exercising a strong moderating influence" (NARA: RG59, Box 3646, file 770.005/258).

In July 1958 Padmore was one of the nine Ghanaians who attended the African Regroupment Party conference in Cotonou, Dahomey (NARA: RG59, Box 3646, 770.00/8–958, Ambassador, Accra to Department of State, 9/8/1958; *Ashanti Times*, 29/7/1958, 1).

According to the CPP's newspaper, the *Evening News* of 5 December 1958, "Padmore accepted a request from the Preparatory Committee of the All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC) to assist in the organisation of the Conference". Newspapers around the world reported on the Conference, held in Accra 8–13 December, and many noted the importance of Padmore. For example, *The African-American* paper *Daily Defender* reported on 6 December that "Mr George Padmore is the chief planner for the conference". According to historian C. O. C. Amate, "with the assistance of George Padmore... to whom he entrusted the organization of the conference, Kwame Nkrumah did everything he could to ensure that the All-African People's Conference took over from where the fifth Pan-African Congress left off." Kwamine Panford notes that "the work of the...Conference was under the auspices of the African Affairs Secretariat through which George Padmore and Ako Adjei worked to support African liberation movements... The behind-the-scenes organizer of this conference is George Padmore... Today Padmore helps shape the African policies of Ghana"⁵ (Panford 1993: 13).

The report in the journal *West Africa* on 26 April (p.387) also notes that Padmore "has been prominent behind the scenes". There is a glimpse of Padmore's involvement/influence from the poster decorating the conference wall: it is a copy of the cover from *The Negro Worker*, the journal Padmore edited in the early 1930s. He explained that "the cover design shows a Negro worker breaking the chains of enslavement that bind the negro masses in the main Negro centers of the world – United States, West Indies and Africa."

Historians agree that there were 62 organisations represented at the AAPC but there is no agreement of how many hundreds attended; some believe it was over one thousand. Among those attending were Patrice Lumumba, Kenneth Kaunda, Hastings Banda, Joshua Nkomo and Holden Roberto. There were 'observers' from non-African countries, including the USA, the USSR and China. The Conference decided that unity and solidarity were essential in the fight against colonialism and the economic domination by the West in the already independent states; it called for the establishment of Africa-wide organisations, including trade unions and youth groups.

At the Conference Patrice Lumumba argued that "this historical conference...reveals one thing to us: despite the boundaries that separate us, despite ethnic differences... we have the same anxious desire to make this African continent a free and happy continent that has rid itself of unrest and of fear and of any sort of colonialist domination" (Adi 2018: 146).

Kwame Nkrumah believed that "the stirring message of the Accra Conference gave a new momentum to the liberation movement... [the agreements] ... remained the basic objectives of African freedom fighter organizations..." (Nkrumah 1961: 187;1973: 131).

Historian Wallerstein concludes that "the AAPC brought many African nationalist leaders into contact for the first time with others who had already won independence for their countries or were in active and violent struggle for it." In a 2018 article, Brooks Marmon determines that "it marked a decisive shift in the organisation of pan-Africanist conferences from Europe to Africa... The initial impact of the AAPC was, however, much more than

4 This includes a long discussion on Padmore. Drake had been a friend/colleague of Padmore's while he was researching in Wales in the early 1940s. Padmore had introduced Drake to Nkrumah, who subsequently appointed Drake professor of sociology at the just established the University of Ghana (Gaines, 2015).

5 The quote from Amate is on this page. Drake (1958: 5) The AAPC was very widely reported internationally – even in New York's *Wall St Journal*.

symbolic. An examination of the surge of political action in colonial Zimbabwe...following the conference reveals the extent to which the AAPC contributed to deepening the liberation struggle in one of the African colonies with the strongest presence of white settlers” (Wallerstein 1967: 34; Marmon 2018).⁶

Most historians note the Conference’s and Padmore’s importance. For example, Imanuel Geiss: “It was [Padmore] who was behind the first All-African Peoples’ Conference”; Hakim Adi: “The year ended with the historic All-African Peoples Conference ... yet another historic Pan-African gathering organized by Padmore, with a team... The conference established Ghana not only as a base for Pan-Africanism and building African unity but also as a rallying point for anti-colonial forces in other parts of the continent”; Olisanwuche Esedebe:

“the enthusiasm generated among participants returning to their own communities influenced subsequent developments a great deal... the All-African Peoples’ Conference met again in Tunis in January 1960... in June 1960...” (Esedebe, 1982: 200, 203, 204; Adi, 2018: 144, 146; Geiss, 1974: 354).

Padmore 1958-59

To understand what Nkrumah and Padmore faced, it is important to attempt to discover the level of US interest and possible/probable manipulations. These are indicated in the letters I have seen from the US Ambassador in Accra to the Department of State. The Ambassador writes on 13 November that Padmore was in the chair of the second press conference called by the Preparatory Committee. A report on 28 November states that “the Prime Minister at a meeting with the Pan African Secretariat, a group associated with the office of George Padmore, became clearly aware of the planning difficulties” for the Conference (these ‘difficulties’ were providing housing, food and transport for the many hundreds now expected to attend). In the post-conference report of 29 December, the Ambassador reported that Padmore and Markham had assured him regarding the accuracy of the resolutions. He advised that although US interests were not directly affected by the conference, the conference could likely further agitate the demands of anti-colonialist forces in Africa which would inevitably further complicate US relations with NATO partners. Given the USA’s possible ‘conversation’ with President Tubman of Liberia prior to CIAS, as noted above, is it possible that the US had been in contact with the Liberian government again? A report in the *West African Pilot* on 12 December (p.1) reports that some delegates walked out of the Conference “during a plenary session yesterday following a speech by Mr C. Abayomi Cassell, head of the Liberian delegation, accusing the conference of meddling in the internal affairs of independent African countries.”

Nkrumah and Padmore 1959

Local papers reported that in January/February 1959 Padmore accompanied Nkrumah and eleven others on a tour of Nigeria to meet politicians, as there had been some opposition there to their pan-African policies. They also gave talks in schools, colleges and many institutions (Daily Graphic, 23/1/1959; Ghana Times, 27/1/1959; Sherwood, 2009: 177).

Having been appointed as Secretary-General of the permanent AAPC Secretariat to further the resolutions of the AAPC, Padmore with Tettegah attended a meeting of the AAPC Steering Committee in Conakry, April 15–17, 1959. Padmore then accompanied Nkrumah in a three-week tour of Guinea (Poe, 2003: 113); Ghana Times, 15/4/1959 & 21/4/1959, pp.1, 12; Evening News, 10/4/1959, 14/4/1959 & 5/5/1959; Sherwood, 2009: 177).

Padmore continued his work on pan-Africanism. For example, the Daily Graphic reported on 31 July that he was one of the delegates from Ghana attending a meeting of Guinea’s President Sékou Touré, President Tubman, and Kwame Nkrumah. This came to be known as Sanniquellie⁷. According to the Ghana Times of 1 August, Padmore had left for Conakry on 27 July and would be going to address ‘seminars’ in Bamako.

1959 Padmore’s death

Kwame Nkrumah reported Padmore’s death on radio on 24 September 1959:

In was early this morning that the sad news was broken to me of the death in London of George Padmore, who for nearly two years was my close comrade... It has been my good fortune to know Padmore intimately and to work with him over a long period of nearly 15 years... George Padmore was, in my view, one of the greatest fighters against colonialism of our modern times... He will be irreplaceable... One day the whole of Africa will surely be free and untied and when the final tale is told the significance of George Padmore’s work will be revealed.

Nkrumah arranged for Padmore’s ashes to be buried in Christianborg Castle. He gave a very moving speech on Padmore. The epitaph on the tomb was: ‘To him freedom for Africa meant more than his life’.⁸ The book in which this is published, *Hands off Africa!!!* Some Famous Speeches by Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, begins with a

⁶ Wallerstein (1967: 34); Marmon (2018) Dr Marmon is Research Fellow at the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria.

⁷ Professor Liebenow in his article on the Conference notes that Padmore was there. Liebenow (1966: 1–32)

⁸ The Funeral Oration was printed. I obtained a copy from the Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, Anacostia Community Museum, Washington, DC, Box 1, folder 27

tribute to George Padmore by Tawia Adamafo, General Secretary of the CPP.⁹ Kwame Nkrumah dedicated his book, *Africa Must Unite*, published in 1963, to George Padmore. He was not the only one: K. Budu-Acquah writer, journalist, historian and then Ghana's Chargé d'Affaires to Somalia, dedicated his book, *The Morning After* 'to the memory of George Padmore who...by his heroic exertions on the cause of African Freedom and his splendid services to the Negro race inspired many young men like myself to dedicate ourselves to the cause of Pan-Africanism'.¹⁰

Conclusion

As far as I can see Africa is still not 'free and untied', so the 'final tale' cannot yet be told. But let us follow Nkrumah's advice and recognise the significance of George Padmore's work to all the struggles for independence and the creation on new states in Africa.

9 The booklet was published by Kwabena Owusu-Akyem, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 1960.

10 This booklet appears to have been self-published in 1961. Budu-Acquah had attended universities in England, probably in the 1950s.

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Marika Sherwood (marika.sherwood@sas.ac.uk) until recently was a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Her expertise spans pan-Africanism since the 1930s, West Africa as a theatre of the Cold War and anti-imperialist struggles. She has published widely on Africa and the African Diaspora, pan-Africanism, and Kwame Nkrumah. She is co-founder of the Black and Asian Studies Association and has contributed to a number of films, radio programs and conferences