

Ghanaian Student Blasts Bulgarians

By ROBERT KOTEY

ACCRA (CUP-COSEC) — It has been my unhappy lot to serve as the informal leader of a group of 20 Ghanaian students, studying in Sofia Bulgaria, who have been forced to interrupt our studies and seek new countries in which to pursue them. It was a painful decision which we and almost all other African students in Bulgaria have taken when police protection was refused us in the face of a pattern of consistent racial discrimination, when we were denied the right to organize an All-African Student Union and when our lives were threatened.

My own experience began when I applied for a scholarship to study economics, and my government which has worked out scholarship agreements with other governments in both the East and West, selected me for a position in Bulgaria. In December 1961 a number of Ghanaian students, including myself, flew from Accra to Sofia to begin our higher education.

We had come to Communist Bulgaria with open minds. We received a friendly welcome, were placed in the same hotels, indeed in the same rooms, with our Bulgarian fellow students. We set about the formidable task of mastering the Bulgarian language. We were filled with high hopes.

POOR CONDITIONS

Early in the year, however, we began to experience difficulties. Living conditions turned out to be poorer than we had expected — not as good as they were for University students in Ghana itself. We were unhappy at being cramped four in a room which was only 14 feet by 9 feet, with four beds, one table with a chair at either end of it. Studying was very difficult, as some in the room had to lie or sit on the bed while trying to read.

Our living allowance was only about \$68.00 per month. We had to spend \$50.00 on food, and this left little for books, recreation, transportation and supplies.

We had all arrived in tropical-weight clothing and were given no allowance to buy warmer things for the cold, Bulgarian winter.

University authorities told us there was no way out of our difficulties. We appealed to the Minister of Education. He told us something would be done. Nothing was, and finally we turned to the Ghanaian government who gave us an additional \$28.50 living allowance per month.

As time went on our relations with the Bulgarian students and people took a disturbing turn. We had been impressed from the beginning with the large number of misconceptions about modern Africa. Both students and professors were in total darkness about our continent; all they appear to have been told is that it is "too hot", that we still have snakes in the streets, and that people go about naked.

After we had been in Bulgaria a short time people began questioning us about the size and source of our living allowance. They seemed to resent the fact that we received larger allowances than the Bulgarian students, even though they could also receive money from their families and did not have to buy cold weather clothing. Some said we were living a bit luxuriously compared with Bulgarian standards, and that when we wore neckties with our suits — as we had always done in Ghana — we were being "bourgeois."

Harassment set in. Both students and workers began calling us "black monkeys" and "jungle people", which were insults not only to ourselves, but to all of Africa. Some of our group were spat on from buses and trains. Water was poured on their heads as they walked beneath windows.

A vicious rumour, alleging we all suffered from venereal disease, was started. Boys in the

streets would shout "syphilis" at us as we passed. We finally had to demand medical examinations to disprove this charge, and although the tests proved none of us was suffering from the disease, the government refused to give publicity to the results.

Racialism in Bulgaria frequently took violent forms and policemen would often watch Africans being beaten by Bulgarians and do nothing about it, protesting he was assigned to another district, or merely dispersing the crowd and letting the beating continue.

A particularly ugly incident occurred in August, 1962. Half a dozen Ghanaian students missed dinner at the hostel dining room and went into a nearby restaurant. Music was playing and one of the Ghanaians asked a Bulgarian girl in the restaurant to dance with him.

While they were dancing, a Bulgarian soldier went to them and asked the girl: "Is it not a shame for you to dance with a black monkey?" The Ghanaian did not want to make trouble, so he returned to his table, but just as he was about to sit down another Bulgarian pulled his chair from behind him and he toppled onto the floor.

Before he could get to his feet another Bulgarian knocked him over the head with the chair, and he fell unconscious. The Ghanaians were furious, and a general fight ensued between dozens of Bulgarians in the restaurant and the six Ghanaians.

There were some Bulgarian policemen in the restaurant at the time the fight broke out but they left immediately and returned only when it became apparent the Ghanaians were holding their own even though outnumbered.

They stopped the fight and arrested the six Ghanaians but made no effort to find the Bulgarian who had started it.

Four of the six Ghanaians were hurt in the fight and were flown back to Accra. The remaining two were jailed in Sofia for a month before they came up for trial. The only witness called were Bulgarians. One of the Ghanaians was sentenced to one year in prison and the other was to serve three years. As a result of the pressure from the Ghanaian government the two were released and sent home, but the incident created much concern among the African students remaining in Bulgaria.

We continued to have some good friends among the Bulgarian students and people, but the Bulgarian government took no steps to stamp out hooliganism against us, and this led us to conclude that it was being supported from 'above.'

Until we had arrived in Bulgaria there had been few African students in that country. However we Ghanaians found ourselves staying at the same hostel so formed a Ghana Students' Union, of which I was elected secretary. We never thought to ask official permission to form such a group.

We had gone to Bulgaria to study, not to engage in politics, and we had in the beginning resisted the formation of an all-African student organization for fear it might become involved in politics. It was only after we were convinced an all-African organization in Bulgaria need have nothing to do with politics that we agreed to form one.

ORGANIZATION FOR FRIENDSHIP

In November of 1962 we took definite steps toward the organization of an All-African Students Union. We had three main objects in mind: to defend our interests in the absence of police protection, to have an organization that would bring us together in the true spirit of Pan-Africanism, and to try to foster friendship between Bulgarian youth and the Africans.

By December we had a constitution and members from 22 African countries. We invited the Ghanaian Ambassador and the Bulgarian Minister of Education to be

patrons of the group. Shortly after the invitations were issued, the president of our group was called before the education minister and told such a group was against the "Principles" of Bulgaria and we would have to disband.

We heard rumours that the authorities feared the AASU was intended to be a political organization hostile to the government. We sent a delegation to the Minister with a copy of our constitution to explain our non-political aims. He took the constitution, asking us to see him later.

On Feb. 6, 1963 the president of the AASU, Tetteh Tawiah, was ordered expelled from the university for having been irregular at classes and failing to write an examination. In Bulgaria each student must carry an attendance card and have it signed by professors and lecturers to show their attendance at class. In every case Tawiah's book was signed.

It is true he had missed an examination, but he had received his professor's permission to do so as he had not been able to get a text until one month before the exam and had to master the difficult Bulgarian.

DEPORTATION

In spite of the obvious falsity of the charges against Tawiah, we would not have been convinced of the full implications of his case had it not been for the fact that the vice-president of the AASU, an Ethiopian, was also warned the next morning that he would be expelled if he did not abide by the regulations of the university. We knew then that the actions of the authorities were not based on the personal conduct of the two students, but rather on the hostility of the Bulgarian government of the formation of an organization which would unite all the African students in the country.

On Feb. 9, Tawiah was ordered to leave Bulgaria within 12 hours. As news of the order spread about 150 African students gathered at the hostel and marched down Lennie Street to demand the reinstatement of Tawiah and the withdraw-

al of the deportation order against him, as well as recognition of the AASU, of the Bulgarian Prime Minister.

When we arrived at the Ministry we were told, by a man who identified himself as a member of the Young Communist League that the Prime Minister was not available, but we could meet with him at 9 a.m. Feb. 11. Our delegation returned then and waited in vain for five hours. Finally we were told the Prime Minister would see them later in the day.

Later that afternoon the Sofia police commissioner arrived at the hostel and told us he had been instructed to say demonstrations of the type we had carried out (we had walked informally together for several kilometers, without signs or noise) were illegal in Bulgaria. He said persons involved in such demonstrations, who had not been warned by the police, were liable to imprisonment for three years, and those taking part and who had been warned by the police, were liable to 15 years in prison. He said we should consider ourselves officially warned.

We said we did not want to demonstrate, but wanted an interview with the Prime Minister. He promised to arrange such a meeting for us.

His sincerity, in the light of later events, was doubtful. At about 3 a.m. the next morning at least 100 policemen surrounded the hostel and made an attempt to arrest the leaders of the AASU. We had been warned by friendly Bulgarian students, and all but two of the executive members were hidden in rooms other than their own. The two that weren't were arrested. I tried to aid one of them, who was in the room next to mine, but as I opened the door a policeman forced me back at pistol point.

Later that morning we all decided that as fighters for African unity we were not interested in staying in a country where the authorities were working so actively against us. We therefore determined to leave Bulgaria. At 7:45 a.m. 200 of us began our march down

Lennie Street to the Ministry of Education. There we planned to demand the release of our two comrades and exit visas and plane tickets home.

We were almost there when 600 armed policemen pulled up in jeeps. They, and other civilians attracted by the crowd, began attacking us indiscriminately, beating and slapping the girls among us as hard as the men. One girl was hit so hard on the face she bled profusely from the nose and mouth. The police arrested us by dozens and finally arrested all executive members of the AASU.

All the arrested students were taken to jail, but later released. All except the executive members. By their detention of only executive members of the AASU the Bulgarians demonstrated they were again a unified African student organization.

The government agreed to give us exit visas, good for three days, but refused to provide us with air tickets to which we were entitled under the terms of our scholarship.

ASKED TO STAY

On Feb. 14, the government sent a group of students and professors who asked us to remain in the country, promising things would get better. We had had more than enough assurances, however, and we resolved to stay in our hostel and not attend lectures until the tickets had been provided. The authorities finally said we could leave but we had to do it on our own. We pooled our money so that some of us could get tickets out. There was only enough money to get students from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea and Ghana out of Bulgaria. Those remaining, except for the Sudanese, who are political refugees from their own country, are there only because they have not enough money to get out. We have heard nothing of the seven AASU executives who were jailed.

Necktieparty's Press Conference

By Dave Surplis

You know, I've always wanted to be a writer. (Freudian demise desire?) So, to enable me to get an idea of just how a really big political writer operates, I wrangled my way into a press conference the other night. It was being held by the notable local - boy - makes - good, Charles Necktieparty and his subjects were political leaders from the four parties. He was interested in getting their views about the forthcoming election. It was so interesting I feel I should share it with you.

I arrive a little early and Mr. Necktieparty asked me to hide in his wastepaper basket so that I would not disturb the subjects. "It is very important to make your subjects feel at ease," he said. Once in the basket I watched him put out four chairs in the bare room and seat himself in one to wait for the men.

Oddly enough they all arrive together, laughing; and talking about gardening and other hobbies they had.

Mr. Necktieparty leaped up showily to shake their hands. Not wishing to offend anyone right off the bat he greeted them in alphabetical order: Mr. Dief, Mr. Doug, Mr. Pear, and Mr. Thom. All but Mr. Pear, having counted their fingers, they moved toward the chairs.

Mr. Necktieparty beat Mr. Dief to the last one whereupon Mr. Thom rose to say that for a small consideration he would allow Mr. Dief to sit. Mr. Dief declined, saying that he preferred to stand alone.

"Well gents, I guess you know why I have asked you all here," said Charles. Pretending not to hear a 'No' from Mr. Thom, he continued, "I, with the true public interest at heart, am now offering you my vast audience (here he broke into a fit of giggles mumbling something about captive in parts' or something) who are waiting eagerly for my impressions of your impressions of how the coming election will go."

"We'll start with Mr. Pear."

"Well, I just hope that nobody brings up this anti-Americanism, that's all; that's all."

"Thank you Mr. Pear. Now you, Mr. Doug."

"I would like to say that I personally did not have anything to do with the recent cabinet 'revolt', but it constituted a consummation devoutly wished."

"Nobody better mention anti-Americanism, boy," interjected Mr. Pear.

"Mr. Thom."

"My parties, when elected, would administer a great many adjustments to the economy —"

"Remember, not a word about 'anti-Americanism', said Mr. Pear.

"How about you now Mr. Dief?"

"I —"
"Have you ever said 'anti-Americanism' Mr. Dief?" questioned Mr. Necktieparty at this point.

"Anti-Americanism?" said Mr. Dief "I —"

"Well that completes the interview, gentlemen. Good night."

Mr. Dief left on foot, Mr. Pear and Mr. Doug left back-to-back on their tandem bicycle and Mr. Thom, kite under arm, went up to the attic.

Charles turned to me and said "That's all there is to it kid; simple as pie."

"Now I'll show you the great stories I will feed my loving readers tomorrow. Four, count 'em, four."

(1) "Mr. Dief Shouts 'Anti-Americanism' During Interview on Policy."

(2) "Thom Would Fill Cabinet with Chiropractors — 'Adjustments Necessary.'"

(3) "Doug Denies Hands Dirty But Urged Revolution."

(4) "Generous, Kind, Lovable Pear Urges Love, Understanding."

"A clear, true, picture of the leaders and the situations; that's what I strive to give my readers," said Charlie.

He added, "Of course, when I get in a bind I can always prop a mirror up on my liquor cooler and interview 'sources close to the cabinet.'"

I left a sadder but wiser man; I hope you will benefit from my experiences too.

Oh, by the way, Mr. Necktieparty's autobiographical account 'Origin of the Specious' published by Doubletalk and Co. will be on the stands soon.