 ***Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause*, by Carol Polsgrove,** Manchester University Press, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-7190-8901-5; 186pp., pbk £13.99

This excellent book is about some of the writers – mainly those living in England from the 1930s till the 1960s – whose writings were either wholly or partly about the ‘ending of British rule in Africa’. The main writer dealt with is George Padmore; the others are Jomo Kenyatta (while he lived in the UK), C. L. R. James, Peter Abrahams, Ras T. Makonnen, Richard Wright, and then Kwame Nkrumah’s autobiography.

So at long last we have an analysis of at least some of Padmore’s writings. It is very interesting to me that while there are books and conferences on James, there has only been one conference on Padmore. Yet, to me, his importance was huge: he wrote for the newspapers of ‘Negro’ America and the papers in the British colonies, reporting on the discriminations faced by Black peoples in Britain and in the colonies, and on the many forms of struggle against imperialism and the need for independence. Wasn’t it hugely important to get these ‘messages’ across to the readers of newspapers, as so many people could not afford to buy books? Or whose literacy skills did not extend to reading books?

Trinidad-born, for a while Padmore was a student at US universities; then worked for the Comintern in Moscow and then Hamburg, before he left the communists in 1934 and settled in Britain. Here he devoted his life to political activism and writing. Kenyatta (from Kenya), James (Trinidad) , Abrahams (South Africa) and Makonnen (Guyana) also lived in Britain then , as did I. T. A. Wallace Johnson from Sierra Leone, in Britain for a while to fight a court case. (He had been accused of sedition for some of his writings as a journalist in the Gold Coast.) We catch a glimpse of all these great personalities.

These men formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) to campaign against the Italian invasion of Abyssinia/Ethiopia. As they failed IAFA was turned into the International African Service Bureau (IASB), and published a number of pamphlets and monthly newspapers, beginning with the *International African Opinion.* Polsgrove describes the Pan-African Federation and its publications as well as the 1945 Pan-African Conference.

Polsgrove argues that publication of each newspaper had to cease because of lack of funds, and that the names had to be changed in order to avoid – at least for a while – the banning of IASB publications by the colonial authorities. There are excellent accounts of all these bannings and the struggles against them. The importance of Padmore’s writings is, I think, demonstrated by their being banned.

There were some political differences between these activists, which are pointed out by Polsgrove. Padmore, for example, was an avowed Marxist and James a Trotskyist and Wallace-Johnson had also spent time in the USSR. But there was another perhaps crucial difference between them, which was to resurface in the struggles for independence: ‘James and Padmore envisioned an Africa becoming more rather than less Western and leaving its tribal ways behind. Kenyatta certainly did not want to see Africa detribalised’. This issue comes up again much later in the book, in the discussions on Padmore’s work with Nkrumah, once he had returned to the then Gold Coast and commenced the struggle for independence.

The book analyses all the major publications and discusses some of the reviews of the books. To help us understand issues, attitudes and events, there are excerpts from Padmore’s and some others’ correspondence. Makonnen’s autobiography is frequently quoted.

Richard Wright’s visit to the Gold Coast is described as is his turning into an informant by giving information on Nkrumah’s and Padmore’s secret correspondence to the US Embassy. Padmore never discovered that his friend had become a turncoat.

Polsgrove gives some account of the lives of Padmore and his partner Dorothy Pizer once they moved moved to Accra. Both worked for Nkrumah, she on his newspaper, and he as Nkrumah’s Advisor on African Affairs. There was some hostility by many Ghanaians, who resented the elevation of West Indians by their Prime Minister. Pizer remained in Ghana after Padmore’d death in 1959, and continued writing for the *Ghana Evening News*, but this is not discussed in the book.

There is much more in this book than could possibly be even indicated here, for example on the novels and other writings by Peter Abrahams and Richard Wright. Polsgrove has unearthed much information new even to me, and I am supposed to be familiar with at least the Padmores and the situation in the UK in the 1930s – 1950s.

I have a few criticism: the book concentrates on writings by a few Black men, and sadly there is not much on the White women without whose help the publications could not have been produced. Nor is there a mention of publications outside of London, for example in Cardiff. Or on writings by Fancophone Africans. And the writers are not set in the context of the Black populations in British cities, many of whom had their own organisations, and whose activities Padmore sometimes reported.

There are a couple of omissions/mistakes which must be noted to aid other researchers/historians: Polsgrove follows Padmore et al in calling the Manchester Pan-African Conference the 5th, whereas it was the 6th – in his numbering of these Du Bois deliberately omitted the first, which was organised in 1900 by another Trinidadian and not by himself. I have always wondered why Padmore did not challenge Du Bois about this!

The letterhead on IAFA’s correspondence never uses ‘Ethiopia’.

The first letter I have on Pan-African Federation letterhead is dated September 1936, so it was formed much earlier than usually stated.

That the coup against Nkrumah was at least aided, if not partly organised by the CIA has now been revealed by the release of documents in the USA.

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