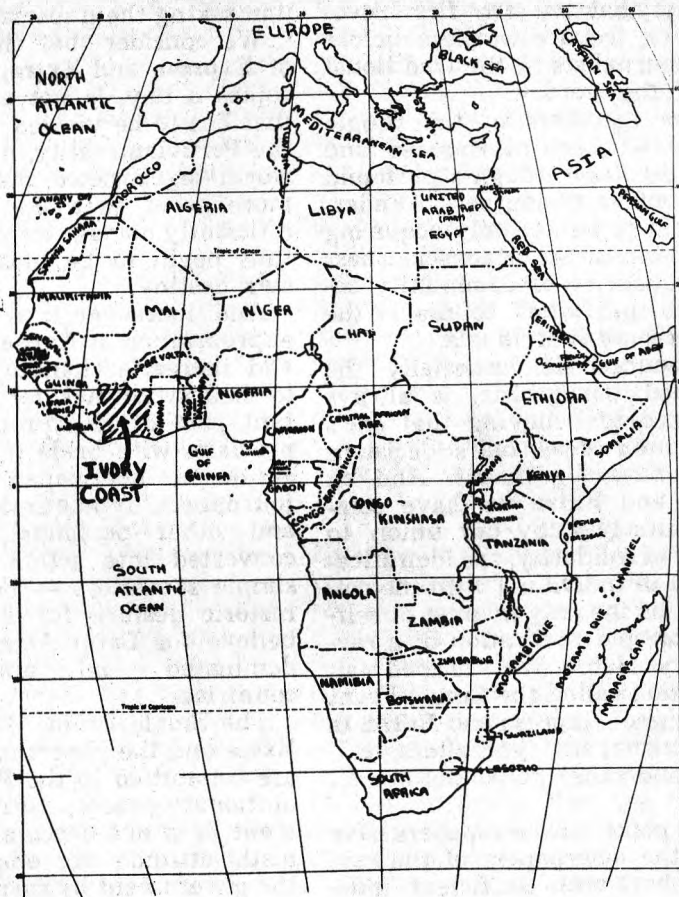


IVORY COAST:



This report, made in 1965 by the revolutionary journalist and fighter, the late Michèle Firk, sheds light on a part of the scene in which the native population of this typical neocolony of West Africa lives. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, president of the Ivory Coast, was the author of the debated and rejected idea of a "dialogue" of African countries with the racist regime of South Africa, during the OAU's Conference of African Heads of State recently held in Addis Ababa.

Pilot State for Neocolonialism

by Michèle Firk



THE *Tourist Guide to the Ivory Coast, Readers' Digest*, the special correspondents of the Western press unanimously and more or less lyrically sing the praises of the Ivory Coast: it is "the happiest country in Africa," "undergoing prodigious economic expansion," its capital, Abidjan, "pearl of the lagoons," a city whose population, which is some 300 000 inhabitants, has quadrupled in 15 years and is "the fastest mushrooming city of the African continent," "a treat to the eye," "the city of work, of the greatest welfare, of hope," "the result of an economic expansion almost unmatched in the history of Africa."

¹ See *Tricontinental* bulletin 59, February 1971. (Ed. Note)

Abidjan, Mushroom City

IT is true that Abidjan is a beautiful city, that it is not lacking in character and even *characters*. Everything depends of the point of view from which it is seen. From the top of the Ivory Hotel (a strongly national name) located in the residential neighborhood of Cocody, the view of the bay is impressive. Finished last year with Israeli and North American capital, the hotel is a super-palace: magnificent, refined, the most beautiful hotel in Africa — even more luxurious than the Hilton hotels — surrounded by a park in which sparkling water fountains are illuminated at night for receptions at which smoking and *décolleté* are the thing. In Cocody, avenues bordered with red and orange flamboyant trees lead to the pretty, modern-style houses hidden in gardens blooming with bouganvillas. The air is perfumed. Further on there are the ascending buildings justifying the name “mushroom city”; the university gleams; comfortable lodgings for the French technicians are being constructed; the new television station is almost finished, and the old roads are being covered with asphalt.

IVORY COAST

Population: 3,850,000 (11.7 people per square kilometer)

Capital: Abidjan, 320,000

Currency: Franc CFA = \$.004

1964 Gross Domestic Product: 235 billion francs CFA (approx. \$250 per person)

Per capita consumption in 1964: Energy: 107 kg.

Major products: Coffee: 300,000 tons (third in the world); cocoa: 130,000 tons (fourth in the world); considerable quantities of bananas, pineapples, palm oil, wood, manganese.

Foreign trade 1965

IMPORTS CIF	M Francs CFA	EXPORTS FOB	M Francs CFA
Food, animals, tobacco	8,281	Coffee	26,253
Petroleum and products	3,248	Raw or semi-proc. wood	18,156
Chemicals	3,773	Cocoa	12,069
Manufactured goods	23,247	Bananas	2,796
Machinery, transp. equip.	16,479	Prepared fruit	1,281
		Manganese ores and conc.	750
Total	58,301	Total	68,418
PRINCIPAL SUPPLIERS		PRINCIPAL BUYERS	
France	36,379	France	25,771
West Germany	3,428	U.S.A.	10,631
U.S.A.	3,161	Italy	6,005
Italy	1,882	Netherlands	4,739
		West Germany	4,534

On the highway that goes to Plateau, the commercial center, the Opels, Mercedes and IDs pass each other because out there, there is no bus line and it is as far from Cocody to Plateau as from Bologne to the financial center. Plateau has an air of intense activity but after 8 o'clock at night it is deserted. It is headquarters for the big industries, the air lines, the banks and insurance companies: it is the dominion of the ministries, the presidency, where between appointments you go have a drink on the terrace of the Hotel du Parc or Pam-Pam, and buy *France-Soir* or *Le Figaro* in the French bookstore; in the Monoprix and Pritania self-service stores one buys fruits and yogurt that come from France and an employce carries your packages to the taxis — most of them red Simca 1000s stationed in front of the door which charge a moderate price.

On the Avenue of the Republic, Chardy Avenue, Delafosse Avenue, General de Gaulle Avenue — formerly Commercial Avenue — the stores are close together “as in Paris” and their names speak nostalgically: Champs Elysées, Boul' Mich'; merchandise is not lacking, the owners are “Europeans” and their employees are “natives”: and a torrent of vendors of all kinds — beggars, sick, children — pursue the purchaser — preferably white — who hasn't yet put away his wallet as he leaves the stores: “Sir, Madame, a little gift...” The moaning or imperative tone and hand extended complete what the French have summarized in saying, “they pester you like flies and you have to brush them off like flies,” to quote a woman preceding a child with an immense box of provisions balanced on its head.

The 30 000 whites in Abidjan live between Cocody and Plateau. Republic Square marks the boundary: it is an area with a kind of obelisk rising in the center, with a statue that tries to symbolize the Ivory Coast in the shape of a woman dressed like an African with a bundle on her head; modern sculpture lightly stylized, which the man in the street democratically calls “Adjoua Ferraille” (Adjoua is a feminine name; it would be more or less like saying “Marianne the Scrap Iron” about the symbol of France).

A LONGSIDE Republic Square, the magnificent Félix Houphouët-Boigny bridge saves the lagoon, uniting Plateau to the port where life never stops, day or night, and to the “native” suburbs of Treichville (from the name of Treich Laplène, explorer and advisory merchant, thanks to whom the Ivory Coast had the honor to become French). In Treichville, the view changes; suddenly it is something else. Is it still “a treat to the eye?” As picturesque for the tourist as the Algerian *casbah*, or the Tunisian *souks*, it is no treat to smell anyway: there are no wells, there are no pipes, there is no running water, no electricity. Except in the homes of a few privileged people who have a chance to own a ventilator or a refrigerator, everything spoils rapidly in the humid and heavy heat. The garbage mounts, invisible

under battalions of flies. The principal avenue is the only hard-surfaced one and the adjacent streets turn into mud in the rainy season. The women grind the ñame and banana, basis of their nutrition, outside or in the patios: the children roll on the ground.

In the market, fruits, peppers, cola nuts which are very stimulating and valued, baobab seed, dried fish are gathered on the ground and sold whole or cut in half like soap and everything else that can be divided. For noses that are used to Air-Wick to drive away the bad odors there is a permanent pestilence: it is the nauseous Africa of rot and of the flies that are described in the handbooks of all the valient pioneers. Inside or outside the houses, people sleep on the ground on mattresses of braided bamboo.

In the houses of the wealthier — the shop workers, the small merchants, those who earn up to 27 000 or 30 000 francs CFA a month — there is one room especially cared for, which holds the radio and the horrible decorations and records that "Europeanize" and the Lévitán furniture which they go in debt to buy from France — this is the peak of refinement — and it turns out that with the import duties it costs two times as much as its purchase price.

The men are not dressed "in European style" as they are in Plateau: they wear a short, broad *boubou* and wide baloon trousers and the women use fabric of bright colors made in Holland for the African market. They carry the children strapped to their shouldders, while they do all their tasks, and they carry the most varied loads on their heads: a bucket of water, a squash filled with fruits, a pile of pieces of cloth; a table.

To Live Like Natives

SAVE for the tourist who comes "once to see the native's life," there are no whites in the area. If one lingers too long in the alleys, there is great suspicion: the children follow, the women call out, the men gather around. "This white man is crazy or he has some bad idea in his head. What's he going to do here?" On the wide avenue, his presence is more justified: there are numerous cabarets in which various eclectic orchestras play Cuban *cha-chas* which are very much in fashion, New Orleans jazz, Antillean calypsos or Ghanaian "high-life." The best known, La Boule Noire, is managed by a notorious pimp who trades with Marseilles. It is estimated that 30 000 women live on prostitution.

But if it is compared to Adjame, the other populated suburb located to the north on the other side of Plateau, Treichville is an aristocratic neighborhood. Don't ask innocently of a Treichville dweller if he lives in Adjame: that would be an unforgivable insult. In Adjame live the unemployed or those who work in the low jobs, the very small merchants, servants, vendors: and a single family (and the African family is big) has to live on 5000 francs a month or less. It is not like Marcody, another residential suburb which is the home of the lower levels of state bureaucrats, who are able to pay 15 000

francs a month rent for a decent house, representing more than half their salary.

The birth of social classes is a recent phenomenon that arose with independence. If there was formerly a black landowning bourgeoisie, the real division was created by skin color. Now we can no longer confuse — on the pretext of "all being black" — the planters, the high and low officials who form a privileged caste, with the embryonic proletariat — since there are still no skilled workers, much less specialists — and the subproletariat chased out of the woods by hunger, the competition of the rich landowners and the big companies, chased out of the fishing villages by the competition of the Fishing Office and its modern measures. Abidjan is a mirage: it is certain that very few work, but the employers have nothing against an excess of manpower, especially when it is ignorant and disorganized: this lowers salaries. But, who governs the Ivory Coast?

A Great Friend of France

THE Ivory Coast Republic, proclaimed in December 1958, was independent in August 1960, the same year as the majority of the other ex-French colonies, according to law. The Tourist Guide states that it is one, indivisible, lay, democratic and social and that its motto is "Union, Discipline, Work." The Constitution adopted by law on November 3, 1960, instituted a presidential regime and Félix Houphouët-Boigny was designated supreme magistrate by 98% of the votes. The President, end product of the policy of integration, is a doctor, former deputy to the French Parliament, former minister in five governments from 1956 to 1959 and holds the Great Cross of the Legion of Honor. Heir to the leadership of the Akoue, a tribe of the Baoule ethnic group numerically important in the Ivory Coast, before taking any decision he asks the advice of the traditional chiefs.

Catholic, he is very preoccupied with omens and "sacred signs": each one of his trips is a long journey because he has been told that he will die in a plane accident and he will travel only by ship and train. Man of refined tastes, he wears a full dress coat — as do all the members of his government — and goes around in a big US car escorted by motorcycle police dressed in white; he has a superb apartment in Paris near the Etoile, owns a complete neighborhood in his native city of Yamoussoukro, with a palace, French gardens, a unique kind of palm tree, water fountains, plants and flowers, a spacious villa in Cocody and, finally, the master work he had built, the incomparable presidential palace about which ecstasies have been written by *Readers' Digest*:

This building which must have cost 50 000 000 new French francs has been considered the "Versailles" of Africa. Completely air-conditioned, it is decorated with pictures of Bernard Buffet, vanguard sculptures, mosaics, crystal chandeliers and Italian marble — two white butlers with jackets and gloves serve great wines to accompany



succulent preparations of French cuisine while an orchestra provides a background of European music.

At the numerous receptions he gives, the President is admirably seconded by the lovely Mme Houphouet-Boigny, so beautiful she can be compared to a black Brigitte Bardot, and who elegantly wears a wig of straight hair and white dresses from the house of Dior. President of the Ivory Coast Women's Federation, she inaugurates all the inaugurable, smiles, visits hospitals and maternity homes, caresses nursing babies, at the appropriate time, gives some testimonial to the advance of her African sisters and smiles most photogenically, as television, the newsreels and the photographs that illustrate the front pages of the newspapers can testify.

The President, a great friend of France, never loses an opportunity to extol the virtues of colonization, nor to proclaim the close and lasting ties of cooperation, friendship and understanding that unite the two countries.

From the other side, General de Gaulle, who (also according to *Readers' Digest*) "has shown him an unusual affection," says of him: "A great Frenchman and a great African." And *Readers' Digest* praises him personally: "Never has he been a partisan of the total independence of his country." Frantz Fanon judged him by other standards: "An enemy of national independence who has never ceased his efforts to convince the African people that the position of the native was the one most worthy of emulation [...] a counterrevolutionary [...] a strawman and fellow traveller of French colonialism [...] a traitor to Africa." *Reader's Digest*: "Disdaining the African socialism in fashion, he refuses no support to private enterprise," "foreign capital of \$25 000 000 a year is attracted," "he offers industry considerable tax advantages and gives foreign companies the possibility of repatriation as much in profits and capital as they wish." In short, for the men of commerce, the Ivory Coast is one of the best markets on the African coast... a bit of attraction for today's business and tomorrow's industry.

Very Anonymous Initials

THE great industries with their social center in Marseilles or London, supported by the state, take over more and more every day from the small colonial companies. They are the ones who control the domestic and foreign trade under various and anonymous initials. The French and German students who were recently invited by the Ivory Coast Students' Union (UNECI) to visit the Ivory Coast, were astonished to learn that the cans of pineapple juice labeled Pam-Pam, American Joy, Jumbo, Samba, etc. were all from the same enterprise, the SALCI.

As for the fruit monopoly, that belongs to COLFRA. If a peasant wants to cultivate pineapple industrially, he can only do so, and in one hectare, if the government gives him permission. COLFRA will send him the seed, which will continue to be its property, and it alone can buy — or not buy — his fruits, without the peasant having the right to sell them to anyone. If the peasant obtains a loan from Ivory Coast Credit, it is turned over directly to COLFRA, which discounts the sum necessary to take care of weeding and other maintenance costs. Only COLFRA will rent tractors. For every reclamation the peasant has to go to the government's agricultural technical adviser, Georges Mounet, President and Director General of COLFRA.

Copafruit has the monopoly in bananas; the French Company of West Africa (CFOA) and the Commercial Society of West Africa (SCOA) represent more than the quarter of the capital invested in the commercial sector and regularly repatriate all their profits. They also have long term investments in Senegal and other countries of French Africa.

As owners of export companies, they also develop the sale of consumer goods, with retail sales handled through Monoprix, and Britain and SCOA have opened mixed shops throughout the countryside. For its part, CFAO is president of the sugar and rice pools. Competition necessitates regrouping and capital is concentrated in fewer hands all the time, with the big industries eliminating the small ones little by little: the heads of government have a share in the big enterprises, the large and middle-sized farmers, white or black, specialize in the cultivation of coffee and cocoa and invite the small farmers to rent their resources like agricultural workers, or go to the cities.

But you mustn't think that because foreign capital is the ruler of the country's economy, the head of state ceases his daily exaltation of the Ivory Coast national consciousness which "in union, discipline and work day by day constructs a prosperous country..." The Ivory Coast has a flag, a national hymn, two radio stations, a television channel, a National Assembly, its party and paper, *Fraternité-Matin*, "great informative daily of the Ivory Coast" whose name reminds one of *Fraternité*, the party weekly, and which, last December, replaced the old local paper *Abidjan-Matin*, created by and for the Ivory Coast. This newspaper offers on the front page a résumé of presidential receptions. Mme Houphouët-Boigny smiles and wears a new outfit every day, the President shakes the hand of the French ambassador, a Dutch businessman or the director of Massey Ferguson export. On the second page, one consults the horoscope; on the fourth there is local news, for example, the description of the parties of Christmas Tree Day, celebrated according to the old tradition of 20 years ago by Breton Friendship with the Ivory Coast. On the fifth page come sports, on the sixth the comic strips. On the seventh and eighth, the news of Africa in the world transmitted through the news agencies Reuters, AFP, UPI and DPA.

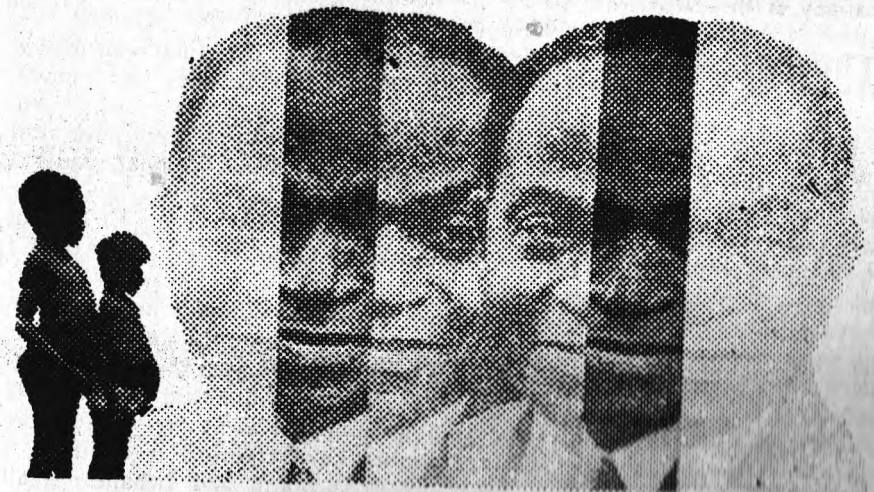
But the Press Is Free

THUS it is that the news from South Viet Nam and the Congo is the same news you can read in *L'Aurore*. The editor-in-chief is Mamadou Coulibaly, President of the Economic and Social Council. And the one who spoke at his inauguration was Philippe Yace, President of the National Assembly and Secretary General of the PDCI. With emphasis he described the press as "daughter and teacher of liberty," and stressed the quality and modern technique of the plants, of the material selected without prejudice as to national origin from French, American and British sources, and of the printing process in which photographic reproduction has completely replaced typesetting: it is one of the most modern in the world such as even France does not possess. It is certain that the enterprise cost a great deal but he praised the generosity of the four holding companies of joint capital:

SIDA, SNEI, SPEC and Franpar, which he did not fail to note is "the most important of the French publishers, producing *France-Soir*, *Paris-Presse*, *France-Dimanche*, *Candide*, *Réalités*, *Entreprise*, etc." For their part, the companies are modestly silent: their penchant for anonymity is well known. Besides, they, like Houphouët-Boigny, have realized that those who were yesterday the colonized, do not feel at ease when they hear it repeated everywhere that they are the rulers of their country, free and independent, and that in the absence of more substantial advantages, it is wise to convince them of the delights of this new dignity in the name of which what yesterday was a burden imposed by colonization must be agreed to freely and willingly with the grandeur of the nation in mind. All the speeches made by the head of state, all the means at the disposal of the organs of information are directed toward this end: to forge, artificially, a national conscience that will justify all sacrifices, to facilitate national unity around the chief, to hush up all demands and nip in the bud any eventual opposition.

States Instead of Nations

THE Ivory Coast, created out of ex-French West Africa like the majority of its neighbors (with the exception of the British colonies and Liberia), in effect has arbitrary boundaries imposed by colonialism, which have nothing to do with any natural reason. Historically, its 4 000 000 inhabitants are part of a dozen peoples also dispersed among neighboring countries and there is an infinitely greater similarity between a Mande from Mali and a Mande from the north of the Ivory Coast, than between the latter and an Ashanti from Ivory Bay, for example. By the same token, the sixty-odd dialects spoken



but not written in the Ivory Coast are incomprehensible to each other and the language which is the common vehicle, French, legally adopted and utilized administratively and imposed on education, has not yet penetrated to the depths of the jungle nor even to the villages located more than 30 kilometers from the capital. As for religion, the erratic path of Islamic domination and of the missionaries has anarchistically spread the Muslim religion, Catholicism and Protestantism while in many less accessible corners, animism persists — a cult of the dead and natural forces — and the imposition and mixture of different beliefs has given birth to a whole series of new synthesized religions.

Thus the way decolonization has worked, and this is not a new idea, corresponds to a true balkanization of Africa. Apart from the waste it represents for countries that sometimes have fewer than 300 000 inhabitants and suffer a chronic lack of political and administrative cadres, the maintenance of a great number of governments, deputies, armies and diplomats who are not concerned with the underdevelopment of their country (in the 1965 budget for the Ivory Coast, the cost of the presidency occupies second place immediately following that of national education, in a country where illiteracy reigns) represents a prodigious drain. And if the fragmentation is disastrous for the economy (the African, that is), neither does it conform to the popular concept that once the deep tribal and ethnical notion has been overcome, the people reach a continental level. It is the plurality of states and leaders assembled by former colonizers that guarantees them the maintenance of their privileges and the acquisition of new ones. Instead of nations there are states called republics. Houphouët-Boigny opportunistically replaces the black kings of yesterday so devoted to France. As for the former colonial administration that rested with the small village chiefs and allied tribes, a replacement has also been found: the party.

Anatomy of the PDCI

THE Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast (PDCI) is the national section of the African Democratic Reunion (RDA), the broadest mass movement on the continent, and Houphouët-Boigny is a founding member and, since 1946, its president. At present the Reunion is not so important now that the policy of each party has followed its own distinct national road: in Niger and Upper Volta, for example, it is a majority in the Assembly, in the Ivory Coast it forms the only party, of which the 100 deputies to the Parliament are members. Moreover, all citizens of the Ivory Coast belong to the PDCI and they are obliged to join it when they reach the age of reason — 14 or 15 years. There are no dues or seals but every year one buys a new membership card, not only in the party offices, but in the market, in the streets, etc. Every Ivory Coast citizen stopped by a policeman who cannot present his party card is considered to have broken the law. To obtain an identity card it is necessary to show this to the administration; it is in every way more important than the identity card and anyone can acquire it, even if he is not an Ivory Coast national; a great many European and Lebanese small businessmen have it, which avoids possible administrative or police problems. It is what is called a mass party.



Whereas in Guinea the party has the merit of having fought tribal divisions and of acting as a true motor for unification — in the Ivory Coast it always speaks about national unity, but it respects divisions and makes every effort to accentuate them. All the base units of the party are created out of tribal and ethnic groupings and there is no unity at all among them: the party meetings can only bring together the members of the same tribal group and all activities of a political nature are undertaken in separate groups. Under these conditions, the elections take on an aspect of rivalry among ethnic groups and to vote is to defend your race. One can understand the interest in such a system when one recognizes that the Baoulé, who are Houphouët-Boigny's ethnic group, make up more than a fifth of the entire Ivory Coast population while the other four fifths are composed of an infinite number of groups whose rivalries and rancors feed the power of the first group.

On the other hand, the 70 000 inhabitants of Treichville, that proletarian section, are mixed and have abolished tribal boundaries since they come from all parts of the country and also from Dahomey, Senegal and Niger... The contacts they have established are based, moreover, on residence or profession (tailors, potters, etc.). To demand that they regroup according to ethnic origin — they number 108 — would mean eliminating them (the members of the same group can live some distance away), and would prevent them from engaging in any joint action or solidarity, retard linguistic unification (in the subcommittees of the party the tribal dialect is spoken), would prevent discussion of real problems; in sum, it would keep them divided and reduce to impotency those who would be, and will have to become, the people's vanguard.

The Police State

AFTER South Africa — with which it of course maintains cordial relations — the Ivory Coast has the strongest police state on the continent and Houphouët-Boigny, who above all has confidence in himself, is his own Minister of the Interior.

Since independence two plots against the security of the head of state have been discovered. The last one was in September of 1963 and is still surrounded with mystery. The problem of "maraboutism" was mentioned and it is almost certain that this was no political opposition on the part of the instigators, but was rather a question of stirring up "a palace revolution." After 15 months of silence, the trial took place behind closed doors in Yamoussoukro, Houphouet-Boigny's village, and it became public knowledge only when the press published the verdict on December 31, 1964. But the motives for the rebellion have not been clarified. As is known, the plot served as a pretext for a series of arrests that were as arbitrary as they were secret — no one knows exactly how many but there were somewhere around 300 — in groups traditionally suspected of having "communist" sympathies: intellectuals, students (*La Voie* at the time protested against the arrest of the Antillean professor Matou), and various measures were taken to expel foreign technicians and professors who were labeled "leftists." The denunciation went up to state levels (first they arrested, then they investigated). There is no real organized political opposition (the Communist Party, clandestine and harrassed, is so weak numerically that it scarcely counts). In Abidjan there is a stifled uneasiness, although fear doesn't permit the critics to express themselves except in a low voice. The slight difference in living standards brought by independence — which truly fell from the sky at a moment of a total lack of mass mobilization — the urban proletarianization and consciousness raising that have occurred, the continuation of relationships of inequality between whites and blacks, the absence of social measures, the bureaucratic invasion that is worse than under the colonial regime, the vulgar and ostentatious luxury of the new caste of leaders and high-level functionaries are factors of discontent among the workers and employees, but also among the low-level bureaucrats who get only the crumbs of the cake and can scarcely get through the month.

Pilot State?

ON the other hand, it is true that if the false nationalism exalted in the interest of the European monopolies is denounced, it is very difficult to envision an opposition that acts only on the internal national level. But there also the nationalist ambition of Houphouet-Boigny who, like a minor de Gaulle, aspires to create the Union of Benin-Sahiel (Council of Entente) bringing together the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger and Dahomey — a little African common market whose leader would be the Ivory Coast might, in a more or less near future, turn into its opposite.

How much longer will the Ivory Coast continue to be the example of successful cooperation with the West, Africa's model country, a model acclaimed by European capitalism, Pilot State for neocolonialism? The United Nations has condemned Tshombe, but how much longer will the second cashier of the continent continue mystifying and deceiving the Africans?

Much less, no doubt, than he thinks.