GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the era of printing, political movements have invariably sought to propagate their ideas through the published word. Printing gave oppositions a voice, initially through broadsheets, tracts, pamphlets, later through books and articles. But as the scale and complexities of print capitalism developed, notably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, small-scale production became increasingly difficult. Authors had to find outlets, willing publishers who controlled the means of print production and sought to limit damage to their reputations or their profits. Moreover, market and distribution shifted in scale from the local to the national and international. These developments moved the locus of opportunity and power from the author to the publisher. In many respects, this is one of the themes of this book. Finding outlets was the main problem that had to be surmounted by Black writers seeking from the 1930s to publish critical analyses of imperialism. Publishers, as well as editors of newspapers and journals, sometimes intimidated by state power, had to be convinced on ideological, social, marketing, and sometimes racial grounds before dissenting authors could get their words into the public domain. The writers were also soon frustrated by the exigencies of the Second World War.

Carol Polsgrove's study reveals the early and faltering attempts of writers such as George Padmore, C. L. R. James, and others to overcome these problems. Their movement was initially united by its high idealism, by a conviction that either communism or other Marxist solutions provided the necessary alternatives to imperial rule, by a powerful belief in moral rectitude, and by a common enemy in the imperial states of Europe. It is ironic, then, that as the publication opportunities for Black authors became more open, helped along by growing sales during and after the War, their sense of united effort declined. These writers represented a coalition of interests that came out of the West Indies, the United States, Africa, and Europe, a triangular trade in intellectual and political ideas. Such disparate origins began to reveal ideological and personal fractures as the flow of books and articles increased. The onset of divisions and distrust was also heightened as it appeared that decolonisation was about to become a reality.

What is striking about Polsgrove's work is the manner in which she has used a great range of sources from three continents, including material from hitherto little-used archives of publishers as well as security service documents from both Britain and the United States. By doing this, she has revealed the extent to which the spotlight, formerly on the big figures of the Black nationalist and Pan-African movements, should be shifted to accommodate the influential women, often white, who worked unceasingly as the literary advisers and facilitators of the authors. It is interesting that these women also communicated among themselves, discussing opportunities, advice, and the way ahead. They also participated in some of the growing divisions among them.

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

By the time that the major authors of the first generation were coming to the end of their lives, high hopes for a particular type of socialist and trans-nationalist Africa were beginning to wither. Kwame Nkrumah, always central to their concerns as one of the first of the nationalist leaders, piloting Ghana to independence in 1957, swiftly came to disappoint them. African leaders seemed, in many ways, even less interested in press and authorial freedoms than their imperial predecessors. A new bourgeois nationalist elite destroyed (though not universally) the high idealism of the early days of the movements for freedom and independence. Ideologies of the left, often followed by lip service rather than practical policies, began to retreat. National boundaries generally stayed in their colonial forms. Power corrupted, in every sense, and African peoples remained victims to warfare and political violence, hunger and famine, wealth appropriation and repression. This book reveals in intriguing detail both the original ideals and hopes as well as the start of disillusion and disappointment.

John M. MacKenzie