

# Land Tenure in Ghana

By GEORGE Q. BUCKLE

In Africa many natives cannot understand the selling of land, although their attitudes vary from place to place. In some areas it is allowed to sell land only after consultation with one's kinsmen, while in other places such as Ghana, the concept of private property in land is in no way different from that found in the capitalist countries. In West Africa, land belongs to either individuals, families or the chief. There is no public ownership of land, especially in Ghana. Most lands are vested in the hands of the traditional heads.

Before projects are established, even by the government, a negotiation has to be made. This poses several problems to individuals and establishments.

Purchasers of land often suffer from a great hardship as a result of circumstances they could not possibly foresee: for they could buy a plot of land and erect a building on it without knowing that the conveyance they had taken does not operate to confer on them title to the land. Again, they might have bought land from a holder, cultivated it for a number of years and suddenly be presented with documents of title by another person claiming title to the same land.

The present economic conditions with regard to land tenure is indescribable. The selling price of land has risen thousand-fold. Land speculation is the order of the day. Presently, the minimum annual wage for the Ghanaian worker is 35,000 cedis. A plot of land at the margin sells for 450,000 cedis. Renting a four-by-four meter room costs almost 20,000 cedis per month. An advertisement appeared for a six-bedroom house near the airport costing 35 million cedis. Before and shortly after independence in 1957, workers could work and save their incomes to buy a plot of land and build their own houses. Others could invest in farming.

The people of Ghana wonder why, 37 years after independence, the country is still plagued with economic

problems and low productivity. There is hardly any tax on the selling value of land. Purchasers rush to buy and hold land. Every year the price of land increases. Government has not stood up to this trend of social and economic problems facing the nation.

(Mr. Buckle is a Ghanian now living in Belgium. He is a graduate of the HGI correspondence courses and wrote this article as part of the course in Human Rights.)

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