GHANA is a community about which a great deal has been written, much of it focussing on political matters. This is understandable inasmuch as it is the political existence of the nation of Ghana which has given that part of Africa such publicity and significance, and inasmuch as the unit of discussion of Ghana has been in terms of the political reality of the nation-state. Not only is the political unit the chief currency in discussion of the country, but in the nature of things it is Ghana’s political structure and process which are of particular interest to countries and their scholars, to the extent that their involvement with Ghana occurs at the political level and in terms of the world political order. Yet major social changes have happened in Ghana which are in a real sense independent of the local political process, and which have to do mainly with the economy of the country and its efforts to achieve modernization of education, communications, medicine, agriculture, etc., and in the very form and meaning of social relationships.

To some degree the endeavour to change the community is autonomous and expressed and formed by the conscious choices of politicians; even efforts to prevent change or resurrect the role of tradition in the community may represent typical undertakings of politicians. And certainly, the process of jockeying for position, advantage, influence, gain, and so on, which finds its expression formally in the Cabinet, Councils, the Legislature, embassies, seating plans at rallies and banquets, is clearly a political process which is quite autonomous and local.

But another process, the economic one, may be in fact more significant in the life of the nation. While it naturally occupies less of the attention of the students of politics, it is in the economic context where may happen the most pervasive and ramified events in the community – which the political enterprise mirrors from a distance. Ronald Dore has argued that there has been an over-emphasis on politics in the study of “developing” or “poor” nations;¹ that the chief social and perhaps the most interesting academic problems lie among the

economic structures in these nations; and that the important background to understanding poor communities is not political theory or concerns about democracy and dictatorship but the manner in which local poverty is perceived in the context of the conception of the possible forms of production and particularly consumption which occur in the rich countries and which become rapidly disseminated in the poor ones. In other words, while it is undoubtedly important to understand how Ghanaian or Nigerian or Togolese politics fit into the political science theories of scholars, it may be of greater moment and interest to discover the manner in which the economic nexus from which the underdeveloped countries derive their very description is translated into social action or inaction.

In this essay there will be an effort to assimilate questions about politics with questions about economics by focussing on the Ghana Civil Service, an agency which is at the heart of economic development of Ghana at the same time as it is a participant in and reflection of Ghanaian political activity. It will be argued that the Ghanaian experience of self-government which was recently marked by a military coup reflects considerable political achievement by Dr. Nkrumah and his government inasmuch as the coup was secular, national, apparently non-tribal, and modernizing; that the extravagances and inefficiencies of his government were deprecated especially strongly because of the virtually world-wide acceptance of a bureaucratic administrative ethic which is a mainly post-Second World War phenomenon; and that at a general but realistic level of analysis, politicians in Ghana (and perhaps comparable communities) have become the functionaries of bureaucratic cadres better able than politicians to deal with the vexatious social and economic issues related to the international demonstration effect to which Dore refers, and of which the series of military bids for civil power in Africa is a symptom.

Changes in Administrative Structure

It has been argued that it has not been the politicians of independent Africa who have effectively made it possible for communal life to carry on, but rather the civil servants.1 Thus, once the pressures and manipulations appropriate to the demand for independence had been exerted and the outlines of a new political structure created, the relatively unemotional and reiterated tasks necessary for day-to-day management of economy and society and the planning for the future had to be performed by the civil servants trained for these functions. Politicians possessed other skills, other needs, and habits, and while some could participate usefully in the administrative process, the majority had career experience and expectations which made unlikely their success at bureaucratic-type endeavours. In a sense then, the military coups reflect not only the extent to which corruption, extravagance, and incompetence marked the