George Padmore stepped into the 1950s more well-known than he had ever been, and with a keen awareness of the incipient presence of the Cold War in the drive for independence. The need for caution and clear thought was essential: the possibilities for political independence and for revolutionary social change were palpable, yet simultaneously extremely fragile. At the end of 1947, when Kwame Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast and Padmore began his long-distance correspondence advising the future leader on political strategy, the West Indies were inching towards federation and Nigeria still seemed the most likely African state to progress towards negotiated self-government. The partition of India and Pakistan had just been expedited, and Burmese and Ceylonese independence swiftly followed in 1948. Self-government in the Indian subcontinent served as a crucial influence on Padmore's thinking; it showed that constitutional independence, negotiated and secured via strong political leadership and an articulate national political party like Nehru and the Congress Party, could succeed. In particular, Nehru's emphasis on socialism and internationalism as the best tools for development after independence became an inspirational model which Padmore referenced throughout the decade. On the other hand, by the early 1950s the 'counter-insurgency' campaign in Malaya had become a protracted conflict of decolonization with clear anti-communist overtones, and heightening tensions within French and British settler colonies in North, East, and Central Africa set debates about self-determination on a razor's edge.

And then, in February 1951, the political opening Padmore was searching for in Africa appeared. The Convention People's Party swept almost all the seats in the first general election under universal suffrage.
in the Gold Coast, and Kwame Nkrumah, who was still in prison at the
time of the election, was invited to form a government. Even before
this electoral victory, as early as 1949, Padmore began to view the Gold
Coast, rather than Nigeria or the West Indies, as the colony that could
lead the way towards independence. Padmore has been credited as ‘the
man behind’ the revolution in the Gold Coast, whose ‘ideas largely
shaped Nkrumah’s policies and tactics, and in turn, affected the course
of Ghanaian political history’.¹ This chapter will substantiate these
claims by examining Padmore’s close relationship to Nkrumah and his
commitment to Gold Coast politics.

Beyond his years with the Comintern in the early 1930s, Padmore’s
work in the 1950s has received the most scholarship and is gener-
ally focused in two areas. It would be easy to identify Padmore in the
last decade of his life through the prism of his two most prominent
achievements: the political ascendancy of Kwame Nkrumah and the
publication of Pan-Africanism or Communism. These were undoubtedly
important markers of his political career. Yet as this and subsequent
chapters intend to probe, neither of these were intended as stand-alone
products. That is, both were formulated as ‘beacons’ and guides for anti-
colonial activity more generally. If we focus only on these two main
achievements, we miss not only the number of other fronts on which
he continued to work but also his rationale in committing to these
activities in the first place. Put simply, these two achievements were one
strand in his efforts to put an end to the British Empire.²

All of the major issues that captured Padmore’s attention in the 1940s
were spinning in complex and increasingly convergent ways by the early
1950s. The longevity of South Africa’s racist apartheid state was being
secured through Western capital investment, even as its authority in
South West Africa was being challenged in the United Nations. Caribbean
workers were establishing their own political institutions and debating
visions for their future, but many workers were also opting to leave the
islands and forge their own future in the mother country, thus present-
ing new challenges to the colour bar and British racism. The evolution
of imperial rule under the guise of development and reform, although
weakened by the failure of several projects in Africa, was nevertheless the
new and now entrenched rationale of imperial rule. As ever, Padmore’s
attention was captivated by the ways he saw imperial attitudes, colonial
practices, and the anxieties of race being realized in international events.

It is here, in the events of the late 1940s and early 1950s, that the
second phase of Padmore’s political transformation can be located.