

Due 11 Mar 70  
AAKUPSS

1970

James Moxon. Volta: Man's Greatest Lake. Pp. 256. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969. \$7.50

This account of the planning, construction, and early operations of the Volta River Project in Ghana concentrates almost entirely on the engineering aspects of the project and deals with these in a quite uncritical spirit. The story is handled as a straight public relations job, which is hardly surprising, since the author was Ghana's Director of Public Information during the whole period. He assumes without question that the project was worth-while, and gives little firm information on the ecological aspects of the project. He is aware of some of these, but assumes that they can be judged only in the late 1970s, when the lake has reached "settled characteristics". Thus, while the lake's costs for electricity could be estimated in hundredths of cents, years before construction began, but the profound effects of the lake on human health (especially ~~on~~ through water-borne diseases) cannot be guessed when the dam is already full and power flowing for the third year. Fishing above the dam has improved, but the ecological effects on health, transportation, climate, soil fertility, etc. otherwise remain unknown to Moxon. He does concede that the sociological effects of resettling 80,000 persons displaced by the rising waters have been adverse, but implies that this is only a temporary condition.

As an engineering story the Volta Lake has little special interest, except that the Italian construction firm finished on time at a cost considerably under estimates. The only real excitement in the story came from the need to meet the arbitrary deadline of September 1965 set by the bankers for the first flow of electricity.

Even from the engineering and financial aspects covered by this volume, the Volta Project raises more questions than it answers. There

was little local demand for electricity in the quantity planned, so a market for the power was created by including an aluminium smelter in the project. The justification for this was the large local deposits of bauxite, but access to these required such an expensive transportation system that it was eliminated from the project (with other local benefits) in the final plans, and the smelter was built to operate on imported alumina for the foreseeable future (p. 97). The lack of a local market for electricity gave the aluminium consortium such influence over the project that it could get a long-term contract to buy power at 0.2625 U.S. cents per kwh. This was probably below costs for the current. The power not sold to the smelter was, of course, available for domestic consumption: the loophole in this appeared during the gala banquet celebrating the beginning of operations, when the power blacked out and President Nkrumah's bodyguards leaped to his defence in the flickering light of Edgar Kaiser's cigarette lighter. By that date Ghana was so strapped for funds and its credit so low that it was very difficult to embark on the almost total reconstruction of the local grid made necessary by the new full wattage current. For the same reason it was necessary to abandon almost completely the irrigation aspects of this "multi-purpose" Volta Project.

Kesseu Moxon's account is quite uncritical, even from his restricted point of view. He mentions without any question of conflict of interests that the Kaiser enterprises were, during the final negotiations, both expert advisers to the Ghana government and chief member of the aluminium consortium seeking contracts. When the Ghana government wanted to hold 10 per cent of the equity capital in the project, the consortium objected, and finally accepted only as part of a general agreement which would prevent Ghanaian private citizens from even obtaining more than 20 percent ownership (including the government's 10 per cent). Moxon

calls this deal (page 68) evidence that the consortium "would play ball if the Gold Coast Government would ~~play~~ also play ball."

The bibliography is similarly uncritical, consisting chiefly of reports by those engaged in the project, while the index is almost worthless, omitting such significant words as "Moxon" and "costs".

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