

# REJOINDER TO DR WALTER RODNEY'S CRITICISM OF DR KWAME NKRUMAH

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"The immortal spirit of Nkrumah presides and will preside over the judgement of history in relation to this decisive stage in the lives of our people, in the lifelong struggle against imperialist domination for the true progress of our continent."<sup>1</sup> Amilcar Cabral.

"The most historic and dramatic political event . . . was Ghana's attainment of independence in 1957 under Dr Kwame Nkrumah, a champion of the total liberation of Africa, an ardent advocate of political unity and promoter of the African Personality . . . Nkrumah hosted in December 1958 the All-African People's Conference attended by several Heads of States and Government including leaders of nationalist organisations waging freedom struggles . . . AFRICA MUST BE FREE! said Nkrumah in 1957. AFRICA MUST BE TOTALLY FREE! We say in 1987".<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Mugabe.

## Fitch Oppenheimer Scenario

Perhaps no personality in contemporary African history has ignited more contradictory judgements, and polarised observers and students of his career and works. Overlooking Kwame Nkrumah's attempt to replace the colonial relations of production in Ghana with socialism some critics of Nkrumah embarked on a path of distortion and peripheralisation of Ghana's first President's contribution to the African socialist revolutionary struggle.

Barely three months after the C.I.A. engineered coup d'etat which overthrew the Nkrumah government a book entitled "*Ghana: end of an illusion*" published in the U.S.A. and written by two American "leftists" namely Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, supposedly criticising Nkrumah from the standpoint of "historical

materialism" appeared on bookshops and university libraries' shelves. This book formed the basis of the criticism of Nkrumah subsequently espoused by a group of Western and African self-styled "Marxist" academics. I am not about to name these academic celebrities, nor am I to list why and how they sustained a character assassination campaign so cantankerously. This issue is beyond the scope of this paper and is peripheral, given the objective here. Suffice it to say, from the outset, that it pains me to mention Dr Walter Rodney as one who, perhaps unwittingly, reiterated the Fitch and Oppenheimer scenario.

## Nkrumaism

The idiosyncratic criticism of the aforementioned academic celebrities revolves around the misconceptions of what they perceive to constitute "Nkrumaism", supported by a misrepresentation of the facts. What is "Nkrumaism"? Why is Nkrumaism an unsettling presence as far as certain segments of the West's and Africa's "leftist" circles are concerned? Why is it that these self-confessed "progressives" do not focus on the tragic mutilation of the political and ideological structures Nkrumah so painstakingly nurtured as he began dismantling in successive steps the capitalist economic basis and colonial totality of relations of production that determined Ghana's neo-colonial superstructure and as yet still does?

Nkrumaism represents the coalescence of pan-Africanism and scientific socialism. Nkrumaism is not African Socialism.

Nkrumaism is a developing ideology as opposed to a definitive one. The cornerstones of Nkrumaism, however, are uncompromisingly static. The recognisable essence of Nkrumaism is so constituted as to be potentially capable of supporting, even supplementing Kwame Nkrumah's own crucial theoretical premise. As these identifying conceptual cornerstones must organise clarification of the impending discussion, I should state them here. The first Nkrumaist premise is the total liberation of Africa and Africans. On the eve of Ghana's independence Kwame Nkrumah declared that, "The Independence of Ghana is meaningless, unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa." It is clear from subsequent writings of Nkrumah in books such as his *Consciencism* (1962) and *Neo colonialism: Last Stage of Imperialism* (1964) that African liberation in its wider context is not restricted to the confines of political independence but comprises of African economic liberation from the West's neo-colonial exploitative stranglehold as well as African cultural liberation from European or Western ideological hegemony.

The second crucial objective or premise of Nkrumaism is the political unification of Africa as a prelude to Africa's economic integration. "It is time that we planned our economic and political development on a continental scale . . . such maximum development would ensure a rational utilisation of the material resources and human potential of our continent along the lines of an integrated economy, and within complementary sectors of production, eliminating all unnecessary form of competition, economic alienation and duplication" wrote Kwame Nkrumah.

mah.<sup>4</sup> The creation of an Africa free of frontiers entails the cultivation of a growing sense of African solidarity transcending contemporary "national" boundaries designated by the European colonial powers late last century.

Last and not least is a commitment to scientific socialism. Historically the relation of Pan-Africanism to socialism has been uncharted and confused. Kwame Nkrumah was the earliest theoritian to establish the categorical imperative of wedding pan-Africanism to scientific socialism. Said Nkrumah: "At the core of the concept of African unity lies socialism and the socialist definition of the new African society. Socialism and African Unity are organically complementary".<sup>5</sup>

## Rodney

Scientific socialism is an integral premise of Nkrumaism. Much of what follows is to elaborate why this is so. Particular reference will be given to Dr Rodney's allegations, which, perhaps, could be attributed to the paucity of evidence available to him. Dr. Rodney "describes how Nkrumah denied the existence of classes in Ghana until the petit bourgeoisie as a class overthrew him." He (Rodney) says that Nkrumah had wandered for years "with the assumption that he must disassociate himself from scientific socialism because it originated outside the boundaries of his own society and he was afraid of its cultural implications".<sup>6</sup> These accusations are without foundation.

Kwame Nkrumah understood that for a revolution to end in socialism it has to be initiated and executed by socialists. At independence over three decades ago Ghana hardly had a "class" of revolutionary progressives among the proletariat and intelligentsia who systematically embarked on a concrete programme for the implementation of scientific socialism. Nkrumah knew that a political party is not founded on the basis of its official declarations. "The Party (CPP) has always proclaimed socialism as its objective. But socialism cannot be achieved without socialists", said he.

To proceed further on the question of Nkrumah's implementation of socio-economic policies determined by the principles of scientific socialism it is proper that we pause to review certain

concepts basic to a scientific socialist socio-analysis. Two concepts in particular are crucial to this discussion. The first is what in Marxist terminology is referred to as the "basis" that is to say the material conditions on the totality of relations of production. The basis is the mode of production or economic infrastructure specific to a historically determined stage or phase of social development. This economic basis by and large conditions, even stipulates the superstructure. The superstructure in Marxist parlance is the sum total of legal, ideological even cultural expressions and relations which are in turn embodied in cultural and public institutions and organisations, the judiciary, the executive powers or government, the administrative structures and military establishment. The state is the crucial organ of the superstructure.

## The Ghanaian Revolution

Kwame Nkrumah's revolutionary experiment in Ghana was three-fold. Firstly, Nkrumah embarked on a progressive, systematic dismantlement of the colonially inherited economic basis of Ghana. "Under colonial rule, foreign monopoly interests had tied up our whole economy to suit themselves. We had not a single industry. Our economy was dependent on one cash crop, cocoa. Although our output of cocoa is the largest in the world, there was not a single cocoa processing factory". wrote Nkrumah.<sup>7</sup> This was coupled with the deliberate policy for acceleration of economic growth, infrastructural development, and the socialist transformation of the Ghanaian economy.

Secondly, Nkrumah laid the foundation for the revolutionary transformation of the social stratum. In other words a social and ideological revolution. "... Thorough going machinery had been established for the political education of the masses so that our socialist objectives, and Ghana's role in the wider African revolution might be clearly understood. This was the purpose of the Young Pioneers (the youth organisation), the TUC educational programmes (for the politicisation of the proletariat), and the ideological institute of Winneba where cadres were being trained. It was to make possible the unfolding of the next phase of the Ghanaian

Revolution: the establishment of a socialist republic, the principle of which was enshrined in the 1961 constitution of the Republic of Ghana."<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, Nkrumah was dedicated to transformation in the superstructure. He Africanised the institutions of the superstructure such as the judiciary and the military. To reflect his pan-African perspective he founded the Africa Affairs Secretariat and the Bureau of African Affairs. African revolutionaries and Freedom Fighters flocked to Accra, the Ghanaian capital where material, military and technical assistance was freely provided to assist the liberation movements. Nkrumah established a political legacy for the entire African continent, with his realisation that aping the bourgeois democracy of the former colonial powers was an alien contraption particularly unsuitable to the African socio-economic and political realities. From practical experience and given the machinations of international imperialism and the neo-colonial state of Africa, Nkrumah recognised at an early stage that the foreign superstructures of the West can never be successfully imposed on Africa and Africans. "A multi-party system introduced into Africa results in the perpetuation of feudalism, tribalism and regionalism and an inordinate power struggle and rivalry... But let me emphasise that a one-party system of government is an effective and safe instrument only when it operates in a socialist society. In other words, it must be a political expression of the will of the people as a whole. On the other hand, a one-party system of government in a neo-colonialist client state, subject to external pressures and control, can quickly develop into the most dangerous form of tyranny, despotism and oppression".<sup>9</sup> declared Kwame Nkrumah.

## Ghana's Political Economy

The two antithetical and antagonistic classes of contemporary neo-colonial Africa are the exploiter or oppressor class allied to international capital and buttressed by the cultural, ideological and military hegemony of the West, on the one hand, and the exploited or oppressed classes on the other. The first includes in its ranks the European settler or expatriate bourgeoisie, the by and large "nou-

veau riche" African bourgeoisie and increasingly the upper echelons of the bureaucracy and comprador classes. Their ideology reflects European and especially American bourgeois ideological hegemony as well as their own class interests and class consciousness, namely elitism, individualism and liberalism. The exploited classes comprise the peasantry, the proletariat, the lumpen proletariat and the lower echelons of the urban salariat. The petty bourgeoisie while progressive during the independence and liberation struggles largely attempts to reconcile irreconcilable ideologies in contemporary Africa. Frustrated by racism and colonialism the African petty bourgeois class was one of the most vociferous anti-colonial classes and was therefore incorporated into the nationalist liberation movements. After independence its reactionary ideological essence revealed it as a comprador class.

The question then is did Nkrumah, either intentionally or inadvertently, hold back the course of revolutionary social development and the socialist transformation of Ghana? Was the Nkrumah Government an instrument of maintaining the domination of the exploiter and oppressor classes? It is my contention that he did not.

The Nkrumah Government was the first in sub-Saharan Africa to launch a nationalisation process. British mining enterprises were largely nationalised. The state monopoly on foreign trade, which was previously exclusively a domain of foreign concerns, was established. The decade of the 1950's from when Ghana became a self-governing colony in 1951 to the early 1960's when Ghana was a socialist-oriented republic, was characterised by rapid economic expansion. The overall development strategy was characterised by a major investment effort in manufacturing industry and infrastructure. The 10 percent of public expenditure devoted to productive investments in 1951-59 increased to 37 percent in 1963-64. The Volta dam in Akosombo to supply cheap energy, and a new deep-water harbour, the largest artificial harbour in Africa, were constructed. Roads and airports were also developed. Recorded employment grew at the high rate of 6.5 percent, during that time.



A conscious effort was made by the Nkrumah government to reduce dependence on the West. There was substantial import substitution of a wide range of consumer goods. The ratio of imported consumer goods to private consumption was 32.2 in 1960 and only 15.5 in 1966. The ratio of manufacturing value added to imports rose from 14.5 in 1960 to 32.2 in 1966. The Economic Surveys Industrial Statistics revealed that between 1958 and 1969 the percentage of consumer goods (durables and non-durables) in imports decreased from 54.5 percent to 30.2 percent. Similarly the percentage of consumer durables in the gross manufacturing output was increased from 0.8 in 1958 to 20.3 in 1969.

## Socialist Transformation

One important feature of this rapid industrialisation strategy was the wide-ranging state participation in the development process. Most of the new factories were either state-run enterprises or co-operatives. Between 1962 and 1966 the per-

centage of gross manufacturing output dominated by foreign concerns dropped from 63.2 to 48.3. Similarly the percentage of industrial gross output controlled by Ghanaian private capital dropped from 13.0 to 9.7. The percentage of industrial gross output controlled by the Ghanaian state sector increased from 11.8 to 19.5 in the four years preceding the 1966 coup d'etat which overthrew the Nkrumah Government. The socialist orientation of the economic policies of the Nkrumah Government took a decisively anti-capitalist tenor.

This strategy of socialist transformation of the Ghanaian economy through the rapid development of both the state and co-operative sectors especially during the early 1960's meant that the closing years of the CPP government were a very difficult period for private sector development. Indeed in a speech delivered in 1964 by President Nkrumah to launch the seven year development plan (1963/64 to 1969/70) he stated that: "We would be hampering our advance to socialism if we were to encourage the growth of private capitalism in our midst".

Adhering to socialist transformation in all spheres the Nkrumah Government took the unprecedented step in Africa of making all education free from primary through secondary to university levels. Two more universities were created in addition to the expansion of the university college set up in the closing years of the colonial era. After independence Nkrumah made sure that all pupils in primary and students in secondary schools received textbooks supplied free of charge. In the ten years after independence the enrolment of primary school pupils, secondary school students and university students increased by 211.9 percent, 437.8 percent and 478.8 percent respectively. Similarly there were rapid improvements in health services and health infrastructure. The number of hospital beds rose by 160 percent between 1951 and 1961 while the number of doctors and dentists increased by 220.5 percent during that decade.

## Pan Africanism and Scientific Socialism

It is clear therefore that Kwame Nkrumah, contrary to Dr Rodney's opinion, was not wandering in an ideological wilderness, "searching for an ideology", but that Nkrumah laid the foundation for economic and social reconstruction based on the principles of scientific socialism. He also initiated the revolutionary transformation of social relations. He nurtured the cultivation of a radical transformation of the economic basis and accordingly the corresponding transformation of the superstructure. When one considers Nkrumah's leadership one recollects Antonio Gramsci's (the pre World War Two Italian Communist leader) regarding another maligned leadership: "This leadership was not "abstract"; it neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, *real action*, with theoretical disquisition. It applied itself to real men, formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world etc., which were the result of "spontaneous" combinations of a given situation of material production with the "fortuitous" agglomeration within it of disparate social elements".<sup>10</sup>

The works of Kwame Nkrumah repre-

sented a coalescence of certain premises the sum total of which is an ideology of Pan-African political, economic and cultural emancipation, African political unification and economic integration, and socialist transformation. His political career epitomised an ideology calculated to accelerate the historical processes common to all mankind, yet specific to the African neo-colonial capitalist socio-economic formation. Nkrumaism gave eloquent expression to the spontaneous sentiments, often passionately ingrained in the social psychology of Africans such as a conviction in the fundamental sanctity of the ideal of African unity, as opposed to nineteenth century European designated nationalisms, ethnic and linguistic even politico-religious loyalties. Nkrumah was the consolidator of aspirations instinctively discernible by the African masses as desirable, as progressive such as the still powerful rallying cry of AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS. This aspect of the African masses' social psychology is the legacy of years of European domination, exploitation and oppression, racialism, colonialism and contemporary neo-colonialism. It is almost a religiosity in its vehemence and cannot be ignored. There is no fundamental asymmetry between pan-Africanism and scientific socialism.

## African Socialism

Kwame Nkrumah was the first pan-African activist and theoretician to denounce "African Socialism" which is a utopian socialism glorifying the African past. "The phrase African socialism seems to espouse the view that the traditional African society was a classless society imbued with the spirit of humanism and to express nostalgia for the spirit. Such a conception of socialism makes a fetish of communal African society . . . All available evidence from the history of Africa, up to the eve of European colonisation, shows that African society was neither classless nor devoid of a social hierarchy",<sup>11</sup> said Kwame Nkrumah. The major proponents of "African Socialism" were former Senegalese and Tanzanian Presidents Leopold Sedar Senghor and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere respectively. Kwame Nkrumah was never an advocate of African socialism. In his book *Consciensism* Nkrumah stated categorically the crucial importance of scientific socialism as the

essential and logical development from Africa's socio-political and neo-colonial economic heritage.

Kwame Nkrumah's political thought and career was characterised by continuity and consistency. It exemplified a progressive revolutionary continuum. In his book *Neo-colonialism: The Last State of Imperialism* Nkrumah exposed the workings of the multinational corporations and their efforts "to halt socialist advance" in Africa. This book was written in 1965 while Nkrumah was still in office. His exposure of the machinations of imperialism and international capital was far more systematic and in-depth than any other African leader at the time.

Nkrumah focussed attention on the Oppenheimer capitalist empire operating through its various components, the Anglo-American Corporation and De Beers. Is it a coincidence that that empire's namesake Mary Oppenheimer published with Bob Fitch the book that was to emerge as the "bible" of Nkrumah's allegedly "Marxian" critics? It is crucial for African Marxists to note who masterminded that blueprint for confusion. It is sad that Dr Walter Rodney's criticism of Kwame Nkrumah and the vilification of the West's gutter press and bogus "Marxists" appear analogous. ■

### Footnotes

1. Amilcar Cabral *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings* London, 1980 p.155
2. Robert G. Mugabe; *Africa Day Speech*, 1987
3. Kwame Nkrumah; *Midnight speech*; given at Ghana Independence, 5th-6th March, 1957, Accra, Ghana
4. Kwame Nkrumah; *Africa must unite*, London, 1963, p.52
5. Kwame Nkrumah; *Handbook of Revolutionary Welfare*, London, 1968, p.28
6. *Frank Talk*, September 1987 issue, p.55
7. Kwame Nkrumah; *Dark days in Ghana*, London, 1967 p.49
8. Kwame Nkrumah; *Revolutionary Path*, London, 1972, p.384
9. Kwame Nkrumah; *Revolutionary Path*, London, 1972, p.372
10. Alistair Davidson; *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an intellectual biography*, London, 1977, p.159
11. Kwame Nkrumah, "African socialism revisited:" *African forum* Vol 1, No 3, London, 1966