

Africa and Marxism - 3

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THE IDEOLOGY OF NKURMAHISM, formulated most specifically in *Consciencism*, is the beginning of an attempt at a non-aligned African Marxism. (I do not intend to show here how the statements of Nkrumah that Folson quotes are not necessarily incompatible with Marxism.) On regaining independence in 1957, Ghana had a clear class structure, the contradictions in which had to some extent but never entirely been submerged in the conflict against colonialism (the class-struggle on an international level, perhaps, as Sekou Touré has said).

Besides the colonially-created class (comprising "instruments of the colonial administration . . . merchants and traders, lawyers, doctors, politicians and trade unionists" as well as "certain feudal-minded elements who became imbued with European ideals" to quote Nkrumah) there were communal societies, traditionally separate states. These had, through the processes of colonial partition, been translated, in the single state of Ghana, into different rôles in the productive process. Thus the Ashanti state became the cocoa-growing area, in which all Ashanti benefited through the traditional societal structure; the northern areas, in so far as they did not continue subsistence agriculture, became sources of migrant labour; and in the Akwapim area a class of "small capitalist" cocoa farmers arose. In the '50's the earlier contradictions between traditional rulers and the colonially-oriented elite gave way to an alliance between these against a petit-bourgeoisie allied with the urban property-less and unemployed and those in the villages who could be won away from traditional patterns. The conflict between these two alliances is expressed in the C.P.P.'s attack on tribalism and on the bourgeois. *Consciencism* certainly supposes class conflict under certain conditions:

"African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment which represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and the culture of Western Europe into Africa, using colonialism and neo-colonialism as its primary vehicles. These segments are animated by competing ideologies . . ." (p. 68)

The *Ghanaian Times*, laying stress on certain aspects of this (and thus illustrating the debate within the C.P.P.) elaborates:

. . . all sorts of pressures have come to bear on African society in the last three hundred years. Each of these periods was characterised by the predominant rôle of the mode of production and was based upon a class structure. . . . At independence these classes do not disappear. In fact they tend to harden and fill the vacuums created by the departure of the colonial administration. (June 9th, 1964)

IN CONTRAST, GUINEA AND TANGANYIKA, faced with entirely different structures of traditional society, and neither having a substantial "middle class" as had grown up in Ghana (for reasons I cannot go into) can speak with more justification of

"classless societies" and a direct transition from traditional communalism to modern socialism. There is nothing in the principles of Marxism, I believe, to say that this is not possible: by conscious action it is possible both to prevent the growth of indigenous capitalism, and to overthrow the domination of a neo-colonialist class, fulfilling a rôle in the productive system of international capitalism. In one of many illuminating passages in *Consciencism* (which may be regarded as one of the substantial contributions to socialism in Africa—certainly in English-speaking Africa—but hopefully will nowhere be regarded as "canon law") Nkrumah shows the essentially new factor in modern socialism, which must be introduced:

(modern) socialism stands to socialism as capitalism stands to slavery. In socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern conditions. Thus, whereas communalism in an untechnical society can be *laissez-faire* in a technical society where sophisticated means of production are at hand, if the underlying principles of communalism are not given centralised and correlated expression, class cleavage will arise, which are connected with economic disparities . . . (p. 73)

Marx had little to say about one problem crucial to Africa, that of industrialisation, except as it had occurred under capitalism. The Soviet Union and China were faced with a problem to be resolved in practice, and we cannot say that the methods used were any less harsh than those of the capitalists. Baran is indeed correct to warn of a "backward and underdeveloped socialism". But African countries are fortunate today in having both the positive and negative aspects of former socialist experiences from which to benefit, as well as a further fifty years in the tradition of Marxist thought and writing. Baran, Dobb, Oscar Lange, Sweezy and many others have applied the principles of Marxism to these problems. Perhaps African Marxist thought will find a better and more humane way: but perhaps primitive accumulation and the rapid increase of productivity are inevitably painful processes, involving a degree of coercion.

THIS IS JUST TO SCRATCH the surface of some problem in the application of Marxist thought to Africa. For those who reject Marxism one can only invite them to apply its tools to analysis of historical situations both descriptively and prescriptively. "Faith" in Marxism can only grow by empirical verification: this has been my personal experience. To those who are better Marxists than I, or have been Marxists longer, I apologise for the naïvete of my still-growing comprehension of its body of thought. To South Africans in particular one can only call for Marxism applied to the complexities of the South African historical situation without the mistakes that have characterised its dogmatic application in the past. Which are the forces likely to produce change? What is the nature of the ruling class, and what contradictions are there in it?

Marxist analysis is not simplistic or facile: it requires comprehension of the historical, economic and sociological facts, the ability to extract the essential processes and contradictions, and to shape them into a thematic and analytic form which can give a guide to action. Marxism leaves much room for disagreement: it is a tradition of thought and not a dogmatic creed. ●

(concluded)