

CLASS STRUGGLE AND BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY IN AFRICA:  
A REVIEW OF KWAME NKRUMAH'S 'CLASS STRUGGLE IN  
AFRICA'

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STARTING POINTS:

By Positive Action we mean the adoption of all legitimate and constitutional means by which we can cripple the forces of imperialism in this country. The Weapons of Positive Action are:

- (1) Legitimate political agitation:
- (2) Newspaper and educational campaign and
- (3) as a last resort, the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts, and non-cooperation based on the principle of absolute non-violence.

.... Kwame Nkrumah, 1949

Revolutionary violence is a fundamental law in revolutionary struggles. The privileged will not, unless compelled, surrender power. They may grant reforms, but will not yield an inch when basic pillars of their entrenched positions are threatened. They can only be overthrown by violent revolutionary action....and those who argue that the transition from capitalism to socialism can be accomplished without the use of force are under a delusion.

.... Kwame Nkrumah, 1970

The extensive exegetical manner in which we have opened this discussion of comrade Nkrumah is deliberate. It is to highlight immediately the remarkable passage of Kwame from Gandhian idealism to a materialist anti-imperialist praxis within the space of two decades. It is also to underscore the consciousness gap between him and his contemporaries in the African liberation movement. For when we

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revisit the politics of many of Nkrumah's contemporaries who are still with us, we encounter soporific spectacles of either stagnation at the level of Gandhianism, or even retrogression in instances where there had been celebrated traditions of anti-imperialist armed struggle.

Moreover, new developments in the African revolution, have, by a historical process of dialectical negation, robbed these stagnations and retrogressions of any positivity which Gandhian protest action could be credited within its day. Indeed, judged by the terms of Nkrumah's Class Struggle in Africa, from which we took our second opening quote, neo-Gandhian Positive Action now constitutes the very stuff of Negative Action in the contemporary circumstances of the African Revolution.

As we have insisted elsewhere, Kwame Nkrumah's place as a leading forerunner of the African Revolution was already assured by the steadfastness with which he posed (and posed correctly) the African agenda as one of liberation from imperialism through socialism and unity. His entire published work and political activism have this agenda as their constant passion. He had no illusions about the fundamental exploiting nature of imperialism. His book, Neocolonialism (1965) remains an unassailable embodiment of this awareness.

On this issue of a liberating vision, he was well-ahead of his contemporaries. His problem, in retrospect, was the more arduous one of overcoming the prevailing superstitions surrounding the placing of the masses in the vanguard of the struggle for realising the objectives of the African Revolution. In essence, it was the problem of transcending the prevailing bourgeois ideological definitions of the African situation and the African project.

#### CONTEMPORARY AFRICA IN BOURGEOIS MYTHOS:

Every age, social-structurally conceived, has its ruling ideology. In exploiting social systems, the definitions of the past and present, as well as the projections of the future, contained in the ideological superstructure, are in strict consonance with the collective interests of the oppressors. Through the systematic propagation of this one-sided ideology, the oppressor classes seek to penetrate the subjective consciousness of the oppressed so that the latter may perceive their historical circumstances through non-realist, mythic, illusionist spectacles. When

the masses perceive their circumstances false consciously, their inevitable false political responses originate from their interior motivational springs. They of their own volition, as it were, accord legitimacy to the system under which they are exploited. The exploiter classes are thus freed from the constant need to elaborate the costly overt organs of social control.

Africa has been no exception to this phenomenon. Indeed, the history of Africa's 400 year encounter with the West is not only one of "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa", but also one of how Africa and Africans were systematically misrepresented in mainstream European thought. In the past, the paramount mythos, camouflaged in a "scientific" garb, was the racist theory of the "dark continent" populated by noble/ignoble savages in need of a "civilizing mission". Today, the transition of most of Africa to the era of neocolonialism, has not led to a general demystification of the conceptual domain. The predominant ideological lenses are still those of enslavement - designed to disorient the African masses from the path of an authentic liberation. Only the form has changed. Today, in the era of neocolonialism, the formal replacement of racist theory has been by an equally pernicious imaging of Africa and Africans in the form of bourgeois ideology.

We are compelled, however, to note a new factor in the false consciousness industry of contemporary Africa. Which is that, unlike the past, when virtually all generations of articulate Africans - at home and in diaspora - actively combated the old racist thesis, we find their present counterparts enthusiastic partisans (culprits) in the production and dissemination of bourgeois ideology. Today, it is not Western Europe alone that sells capitalist society as a positive utopia. African opinion makers themselves, are also involved in this cosmetic reconstruction and propagation of capitalist society, culture and psychology as the practical and aesthetic ideal for Africa's future. With the exception of few outposts, the policies and activities of state functionaries and organs, the established pedagogy of our universities, as well as the content of our mass media, are geared towards the promotion of bourgeois values and the consolidation of inherited capitalist structures.

Myth-promotion, rather than scientific analyses, is the central tendency of the political and ideological superstructures of neocolonial Africa. The variegated strands of the bourgeois consciousness industry in Africa forms a vast subject - too complex for our present purposes. It is the core myth of this disorienting ideological ensemble that will be sketched in what follows. We refer here to the exceptionalist myth of a class-less Africa and the corresponding denial of the continuing necessity for class struggle in Africa. This restriction is in line with the main thrust of Nkrumah's book. His Class Struggle In Africa is an attempt to combat bourgeois delusions of endemic African consensualism which currently serve as a brake on the African liberation movement.

#### The Recognition of Internal Class Contradictions:

The introductory pages of this 96-page book, which Nkrumah has dedicated to the workers and peasants of Africa, are immediately forthright on this ideological problem of African Revolution. This is how he states the central problem of the African Revolution:

At the core of the problem is the class struggle. For too long, social and political commentators have talked and written as though Africa lies outside the mainstream of world historical development - a separate entity to which the social, economic and political patterns of the world do not apply. Myths such as "African Socialism" and "pragmatic socialism", implying the existence of a brand or brands of socialism applicable to Africa alone, have been propagated; and much of our history has been written in terms of socio-anthropological and historical theories as though Africa had no history prior to the colonial period. One of these distortions has been the suggestion that the class structures which exist in other parts of the world do not exist in Africa. (p. 10)

But, Nkrumah immediately contends;

Nothing is further from the truth. A fierce class struggle has been raging in Africa. The evidence is all-around us. In essence it is, as in the rest of the world, a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. (p. 10)

During the "pre-independence" phase of the struggle, the petty-bourgeois leadership of the nationalist movement had fashioned the slogan of national unity to eject the colonial power. According to Nkrumah, it is this temporary blurring of the internal class cleavages and

the muting of class antagonisms that "led some to proclaim", after independence, "that there were no class divisions in Africa, and that the communalism and egalitarianism of traditional African society made any notion of the class struggle out of the question". (p. 10)

One of the aims of the book is to warn the working masses against accepting this absolutization of what was really a historically specific class alliance. African masses must now recognise that:

Africa has in fact in its midst a hard core of bourgeoisie who are analogous to colonists and settlers in that they live in positions of privilege - a small, selfish, money-minded, reactionary minority among vast masses of exploited and oppressed people. . . . Their survival depends on foreign support. (p. 12)

In our view, it is this recognition of class premised internal antagonistic contradictions in the neocolonial state, as well as the bold unmasking of the African bourgeoisie as the internal enemy, that makes Nkrumah's book a radical departure from the theoretical effusions of most of his contemporaries in the political and intellectual establishments of present-day Africa.

By this naming of an internal enemy, Nkrumah does not thereby deny the continued deleterious impact of the imperialist cartels. On the contrary, his identification of an internal enemy - the African bourgeoisie - renders the discussion of imperialism in neocolonial Africa less abstract and less distant. Imperialism is thus not some external enemy against which the entire nation may be mobilized through consensus-building movements with slogans of African cultural authenticity. In Nkrumah's book, imperialism is here in the inwards of the nation through its black bourgeois couriers. Therefore, further advancement of the national liberation struggle against imperialism now requires that the African masses "settle matters with its own bourgeoisie" as well.

#### CLASS DYNAMICS IN AFRICA:

Nkrumah categorises the present class profile in Africa into privileged classes and oppressed classes. The privileged consist of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie, officers of the armed forces and police, intelligentsia, professional class and compradors". The oppressed classes are the "workers, peasants, small farmers and traders".(p. 11)

i) The bourgeoisie:

The African bourgeoisie, as a totality, is aware of its class affinity with foreign capital. They have "common interests in prolonging their dominance by preserving the fundamental features of the colonial state apparatus". (p. 60) They strive towards a conscious closure of their ranks regardless of race and ethnic difference. Their common class feeling is shown in their "Chambers of Commerce", Rotary, and masonic type exclusive cults.

The "bureaucratic bourgeoisie", for example, "are closely connected with foreign firms, with the diplomats of imperialist countries, and with the African exploiting classes" (p. 61). This "spoilt child" (p. 60) of neocolonial regimes, had its position "strengthened immeasurably by the Africanisation policies of the newly-independent government" (p. 61) because of its monopoly of "administrative and technical expertise". Their education both isolates them from the masses and enables them to mislead popular governments by the way they "select and organise the information to be laid before ministers responsible for the formulation of policy". (p. 67) The arrogance and hostility of these bureaucrats in relation to the masses and progressive "political authority" is matched only by their devoted loyalty to neocolonial interests. They have power without accountability. Moreover, "when reactionary military coups take place", they are ever-ready to serve the new regime with day to day administration and the drafting of decrees.

Two other strata of the African bourgeoisie - the coercive forces and the intelligentsia - are, in this book, conceived of as essentially groups that have been unable to shed the heritage of their anti-nationalist colonial history and education. It is of course the officer corps of the coercive forces that Nkrumah has in mind. Africanisation policies of the independence regimes also led to "many Africans who were not really qualified" to become commissioned officers "because of the lack of suitable candidates". (p. 41). Thus they and the intellectuals ("an elite susceptible both to Left and Right opportunism") (p. 36) are also easily penetrated by foreign capitalist forces. Finally, the colonially-determined subordinate status of the "commercial bourgeoisie" in relation to foreign capitalists does not place it in contradiction to other

categories of the African bourgeoisie. Like them, this comprador group, accepts politics as the struggle to protect private property.

Thus, as a collectivity, the African bourgeoisie consciously wages a class struggle against the workers and peasants to protect their material privileges. While maintaining class unity in their own ranks, they seek to block worker solidarity by fostering "tribalism" in their midst. Worker solidarity on a pan-African and even "Third World" scale is also deliberately thwarted by the bourgeoisie through its periodic scapegoating of "alien" immigrant workers. This bourgeois diversionary technique of projecting the economic problems of the neo-colonial state on alien workers, is, according to Nkrumah, unfortunately facilitated by the historical conflation of the "class-race" cleavage of colonial society. This fact, even under the conditions of neocolonialism, has tended to blunt "the awareness of the workers to the existence of indigenous bourgeois exploitation. The workers' attack is directed against Europeans, Lebanese, Indians and others, while the indigenous reactionary exploiter is overlooked". (p. 66)

A further technique of domination employed by the bourgeoisie, is the propagation of received theories of "elitism", "laissez-faire", "individualism"; the incorporation of myths such as the "silent majority", "average" or "ordinary citizen" into the active popular political vocabulary; as well as the specific concoctions of so-called authentic African ideologies. For example, Nkrumah has no patience with "negritude", which he dismisses as a "bogus conception... pseudo-intellectual theory (which) serves as a bridge between the African dominated middle-class and the French cultural establishment". (p. 25)

ii) The oppressed classes:

The industrial proletariat and the peasantry constitute the core groups of the oppressed. Both are oppressed by capital. The proletariat, the direct creation of colonial capital, lives in the urban centres (see pp. 64-74). The peasantry ("the largest contingent of the working class" p. 75) lives in the countryside. Though not a direct creation of colonialism, its economic situation has nonetheless been demoralized by it. The peasant is exploited doubly by the new forces of colonial capital and those of pre-colonial feudal chiefs. It is these two classes who constitute the revolutionary constituency for the socialist transforma-

tion of the continent. The proletariat, though small numerically, is "the class base for building socialism", (p. 64) while the peasantry, though unorganised and politically backward, is "potentially the main force for socialist revolution". (p. 75) Within, the ranks of the peasantry, it is the poorest segments - particularly, the landless agricultural labourers - whom Nkrumah singles out as the best revolutionary candidates.

The proletariat, the peasantry and the "revolutionary intelligentsia" are "natural class allies". (pp. 75, 79). Unlike the indigenous bourgeoisie, the aspirations of these "natural allies" are necessarily socialist. The proletariat, in particular, had already played an active role in the independence struggles by using the power of strike action. Thus it is they and the revolutionary intelligentsia who can win the countryside into socialist revolutionary action.

iii) Socialist revolution:

An issue on which Nkrumah is insistent is that the indigenous bourgeoisie is already waging a class war against the working masses. In his view, the typical form which this class war has taken is the succession of military coups and civil wars. The bourgeois class-character of these coups, he adduces from the non-participation of the masses in their occurrence, as well as their reactionary content. Only a few coups can be said to have been progressive.

The only option for the working masses is to wage their own class struggle. This struggle must adopt Marxism as its political creed and must be led by a socialist revolutionary vanguard party - an "All-African working class Party". The Party must forcefully define the present situation as one in which there is "no half-way to socialism".(p. 84) There is no intermediate "non-capitalist road", pursued by a "united front of progressive forces".(p. 84) There are only two roads - that of capitalist-imperialist exploitation and that of socialist liberation. "It is a struggle between socialism and capitalism, not between a so-called 'Third World' and imperialism".(p. 83)

Its method of struggle is that of armed revolutionary violence coordinated through an "All-African Military High Command" - the military arm of the continental workers' party. Gone are the days of 'Positive Action' of moral pressure and peaceful defensive labour



sit-downs! The goal of this struggle: "The total liberation and unification of Africa... the primary objective of all Black revolutionaries throughout the world".(p. 88) An objective which is "an integral part of the world socialist revolution"(p. 10) and which thereby contributes to the "onward progress towards world communism, under which every society is ordered on the principle of - from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".(p. 88)

#### Comrade Nkrumah's Revolutionary Passage:

...the theory of the class struggle was created not by Marx, but by the bourgeoisie before Marx, and generally speaking, it is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Those who recognise only the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the bounds of bourgeois thinking and politics... A Marxist is solely someone who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

.... Lenin.

While he was physically with us, Kwame Nkrumah was a prime target of imperialist forces. No other African has received a greater volume of hostile attention from reactionary sources in the media and academia, both within and outside Africa. The imperialist sponsored coup which overthrew his government in 1966 virtually beheaded the African Revolution for a long time. Even now, the Revolution has not had a successor with equal continental stature.

Not satisfied with his removal from political power, imperialism continued to wage the anti-Nkrumah battle on the ideological front. There was a stampede to erase his ideas from the public consciousness by trivializing, ridiculing and distorting them. This ideological battle front was the special province of the reactionary intelligentsia within and outside the continent. Beginning with Ali Mazrui's opening salvo in which he, the consummate "whig interpreter" of African politics, tried to "prove" that Nkrumah was an unrealised cross between Lenin and a Csar, bourgeois scholars from the West volunteered their services to redirect Africans from Nkrumah's visions by redefining for us how we were to remember him. Henry Bretton, one of these new "peace corps" volunteers proffered the following:

In Nkrumahist Ghana, practice was controlled by irrational thought. . . Nkrumah had succeeded in numbing the collective mind of Ghana by promoting a cacophony of ideological double talk and Byzantine cant. He had also succeeded in projecting a favourable image among a substantial portion of the less-informed, because more distant, frustrated youth elsewhere in Africa. . . Ideologically, he had only succeeded in making an articulate and able people temporarily deaf and dumb and in confusing the issues confronting Africa in general.(9)  
(emphasis mine)

In the light of these reactionary assessments, bourgeois scholars must find Nkrumah's "Conakry writings" - of which Class Struggle In Africa is an integral part, - even more upsetting. For any radical assessment of Nkrumah's writings shows that his post-coup works (which include "African Socialism Revisited", "The Myth of the Third World", Dark Days in Ghana, Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare) indicate an even keener awareness, than in his earlier writings, of the mass-line requirements for a successful anti-imperialist African Revolution. The theoretical unease between Marxism and the Bourgeois outlook, the conceptual vacillations contained in his pre-1966 writings, are largely superseded in the post-coup work.

His earlier contradictory positions on the status religion; the tendency to conceive socialism as "an attitude of mind"; the neo-Senghorean rationalisation of socialism in terms of its presumed congruence with the "African Personality" of pre-colonial Africa; the earlier vacillation about the inevitability of the class struggle in the construction of socialism in Africa; and his absolutization of non-alignment in the manner of India's Nehru, are overcome in the later works. Those earlier ideological problems that led him to ignore the fundamental proletarianization of the Ghanaian state apparatus at home, and the adoption of an idealist "Positive Action" moral strategy with African leaders on the pan-African front, are totally repudiated - at least by implication - in the Class Struggle and in the Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare.

In his last writings, it is the masses and the socialist revolutionary intelligentsia who can complete the anti-imperialist revolution. "In the revolutionary struggle", he now warns in the Class Struggle, "no reliance can be placed on any section of the bourgeoisie or the petty

bourgeoisie".(p. 81 our emphasis). When, as we have noted earlier, he means those who have proletarianised themselves through,

.... the adoption of Marxism as a political creed, and the formation of Communist parties or similar organisations which bring them into constant close contact with workers and peasants.(p. 40, our emphasis)

This decisive shift in favour of the masses not only as beneficiaries but as the authors of a socialist anti-imperialist revolution is reflected in the popular style of his later work. Both Class Struggle and the Handbook are written in direct, simple language, complete with illustrative diagrams - an attempt to enhance their accessibility within the literate ranks of the masses. Short and therefore handy, these books are in fact manuals for actual use in the revolutionary struggle.

Like manuals, therefore, Class Struggle In Africa suffers from the problem of being overcrowded with categorical statements on various topics, in need of elaboration. Its continental range also means that the nuances in the class dynamics of specific countries or regions are necessarily absent. But these are issues which the socialist intelligentsia, whom Nkrumah had in mind, must set themselves for in-depth probing, as an aspect of their contribution to heightening revolutionary consciousness on the continent.

There are however certain problems in the book which are of a theoretical nature. For example, his summary definition of social class as "nothing more than the sum total of individuals bound together by certain interests which as a class they try to preserve and protect" (p. 17) retains the mark of bourgeois social science fog. It is only from his conception of the state as a class institution, and his empirical characterisation of the indigenous bourgeoisie that the historical materialist tenor of his general argument is illumined.

This theoretical imprecision/uncertainty is revealed also from time to time in the way he tries to account for the genesis of these classes. Apart from a broad anchorage of their genesis in the colonial era, the precise way in which the imposed capitalist mode of production structurally generated these classes is not provided. Instead there is the tendency to explain the origins of the new classes and their behaviour in terms of "urbanisation", "industrialisation" and colonial cultural socialization. Consider the following statement on the proletarianisation process:

Urbanisation is at the core of social change. Therefore, industrialisation which is the main cause of urban growth, determines the social pattern. With growing industrialisation, the African proletariat will increase in numbers and become more class conscious. (p. 70)

We ask: is it class struggle, or urbanisation that is at the "core of social change?" Which type of "industrialization does he have in mind? Capitalist industrialization or socialist? Are urban centres alike, regardless of the differences in the class character of the larger social systems of which they are part? Is the quantitative increase of the proletariat a sufficient criterion for the emergence of a proletarian class consciousness?

This problem also shows up in his identification of the indigenous bourgeoisie. Although this identification of this class as a negative political factor, in the completion of the anti-imperialist struggle is important, he has tended very often to split its various strata into separate classes. Hence his categorization: "privileged classes".

Finally, on this note, there is the hint that Nkrumah, in this book, is not sufficiently clear on the role of the masses in the "post-struggle" socialist construction process. To be sure, he has stated that the socialist state "really expresses the aspirations of the masses, and... ensures their participation in every aspect of government". (p. 81) This position, in the light of Nkrumah's attempt at socialist construction in Ghana, is a big advance from the non-inclusion of the Ghanaian masses in his government. But in these days, when the crisis of advanced capitalist societies has led to the spawning of "participatory democracy" experiments in factories and some state institutions, it is important to be explicit that it is not the mere participation in government that is the criterial attribute of the socialist state. Rather than a participation, which, in reality reduces to an empty vicarious one, the socialist state is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These caveats notwithstanding, Class Struggle In Africa is a valuable book. Its short chapters contain ideological weapons for combating many forms of bourgeois mystification in contemporary Africa. In the year of its publication, 1970, this work and Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, were the only accessible book-length

discussions of Africa from a class perspective. Today, it is still one of the most readily available sources for ideas with which the proletarian vanguard and students can confront that pseudo-progressive concept of the "non-capitalist road". Pressed to the wall, petty-bourgeois reformism in Africa has now seized upon this non-socialist, "non-capitalist road" as a cosmetic coating for what, in reality, is the dilapidated body of the neocolonial policy. Nkrumah's demolition of this seductive myth, in two sections of the book, highly recommend it.

Moreover, the revolutionary geographical map which opens the book, showing graphically that Africa and its islands has a land area which can easily enclose India, Europe, Japan, the British Isles, Scandinavia, New Zealand, the United States of America, "and with room to spare", (p. 13) must begin to arouse the consciousness of oppressed Africa on what is to be done! With the births of Maputo and Luanda, bourgeois ideologues in our midst, should find it increasingly difficult to dismiss Nkrumah's re-statement of the African Revolution in *Class Struggle In Africa*, as an irrational utopianism.