



A prominent figure in the African national liberation movement, the founder and first President of the Republic of Ghana.

Kwame Nkrumah was born on September 21, 1909 in the village of Nkroful (in the Western province of what was then the British colony of the Gold Coast) into a jeweller's family from the Nzima tribe.

On finishing a Catholic primary school in Half Assini, in 1926, he trained at the Accra and Achimota colleges of education.

Nkrumah began his career working as a teacher in Catholic schools in Elmina and Axim (Ghana).

Between 1935 and 1945, Nkrumah studied and then taught philosophy at Lincoln University (Pennsylvania, USA), having graduated with a Bachelor of Economics, Sociology and Theology. In Pennsylvania University, where he taught history and philosophy, he received the degree of Master of Education and Philosophy.

During his studies in the USA, he worked in shipyards, at a soap factory and as a waiter and corridor attendant on ships. While in the States, he began active political work. He studied the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the writings of Black ideologists and educationalists in the USA. He also studied at London University and at the London School of Economics.

Nkrumah also possessed honorary degrees of Doctor of Law from the universities of Moscow, Lincoln, Cairo and others.

From 1945 to 1947, Kwame Nkrumah lived in England, where he took part in preparations for the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester (October 1945). He was Secretary of the Congress's organisational committee and then General Secretary of the Working Committee which was elected to implement the programme for African liberation planned by the congress. At this time he became the General Secretary of the West African National Secretariat, set up in London. In 1946-47, he was editor of the New African newspaper, published in London.

Kwame Nkrumah returned to his country in December 1947, and became a member and later the General Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). On March 12, 1948, he was arrested (in connection with unrest in the February and March of that year) and exiled to the north of the country. The increase in the revolutionary mood in the country led to Nkrumah's split with the United Gold Coast Convention.

In June 1949, he established the Convention People's Party, which called for the immediate granting of national independence.

In September 1948, Nkrumah began printing the newspaper Accra Evening News. In January 1950 he was arrested again and imprisoned for organising strikes.

During the elections to the Legislative Assembly in February 1951, at which the Convention People's Party was victorious, its leader, still in prison, was elected a member of the Assembly from the Central constituency in Accra. On February 12, 1951, he was released early from prison.

From 1952, Nkrumah was Prime Minister of the first African government of the Gold Coast; he simultaneously held the posts of Minister of Defence, Home Affairs Minister and Foreign Minister.

On March 6, 1957, after the Gold Coast gained independence, he became the country's Prime Minister, now named Ghana on his suggestion. On July 1, 1960, when Ghana was declared a republic, he was elected President, and remained so until February 24, 1966.

In 1961, Nkrumah was elected General Secretary of the Convention People's Party and its life Chairman.

In April 1962, the International Lenin Prize Committee awarded Nkrumah the 1961 International Lenin Prize for the Strengthening of Peace among Peoples.

Kwame Nkrumah visited the Soviet Union twice, first in 1961 and then in March 1966.

On February 24, 1966, following a military coup in Ghana, Nkrumah was removed from all his posts and forced to leave the country. He settled in Guinea where he became an honorary member of the House of Representatives, co-President of Guinea and General Secretary of the country's Democratic Party.

Kwame Nkrumah died on April 27, 1972 in Bucharest. On July 9 of the same year he was buried in his home village of Nkroful.

Kwame Nkrumah was one of the leading figures of the anti-colonial movement in Africa in the 1940s-1960s. His contribution to the development of the continent after the Second World War went far beyond his own country. As a politician, Nkrumah became a symbol of the freedom and unity of Africa, and of the relentless struggle against colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. He was a statesman who enjoyed international respect and a notable ideologist and political

thinker. He strove to achieve a philosophical understanding of the processes of national and social emancipation of the colonial countries. He aimed to fathom and uncover the inner contradictions of the national liberation movement and its powerful latent forces which contributed to the progress and crises of the movement. Slowly but surely, he came to the recognition of the decisive role of class and anti-imperialist struggle in Africa today.

Nkrumah's fate was tragic. After the triumphant culmination of the liberation struggle by peaceful means in the British colony, the Gold Coast, and after many years of apparently lasting and outstanding government in the Republic of Ghana, he ended his days in solitude and in exile. In this difficult moral and political climate, when his activities were restricted against his will, Nkrumah took to his literary, or investigatory, work with redoubled energy, trying to examine critically the history and outline the perspectives of the African revolution. It must be said that the end of Nkrumah's life was not a tragedy of despondency and despair. It was the tragedy of a great fighter for a better future in Africa, who did not find adequate support for his plans either in his own country or in the continent.

Nkrumah's activities reflected many diverse features characteristic of some of the leaders of the contemporary national liberation movement: the democratism of a leader of the masses in the period of the liberation movement and methods of power handed down from the medieval traditions of the African tribal system; attraction to socialism and crude nationalist prejudices; the desire to honestly serve the interests of the people and excessive personal ambition; Labour-type reformist illusions and leftist radicalism. All this reflected the acute and very real contradictions which characterised the intermediate, petty-bourgeois strata in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, strata which came to the forefront in the struggle for independence and became the most active force after the Second World War in the dozens of young national states which emerged in the 1950s-1970s. It is precisely for this reason that the whole of Nkrumah's political life, with all its ups and downs, and the whole of his theoretical legacy, with all its correct ideas and mistakes, represent a major experimental school for African revolutionaries.

Kwame Nkrumah became widely known after the war, when the pan-African movement was entering a new stage—the organisation of the national liberation movement in various countries within the continent. At the Fifth Pan-African Congress at Manchester in October 1945, he was the main speaker on the problem of the struggle of the peoples of Western Africa for independence. Even then Nkrumah was a militant anti-imperialist, who rejected the conciliation and reformism of earlier pan-African congresses and the false assertions of bourgeois and right-wing socialist propaganda about the civilising mission of colonialism. It is indicative that Nkrumah, like the majority of the participants at the Fifth Pan-African Congress, shared the view that the aims of the national liberation movement

did not come down merely to the attainment of independence, but presupposed the establishment of a democratic system and the improvement of the people's welfare on the basis of socialism. This demonstrated that Nkrumah's political views had really evolved in a progressive direction, which many of the African leaders at that time could neither understand nor foresee.

True, Nkrumah's ideas about socialism were not entirely class-oriented at that time. In this sphere he had not yet got rid of his reformist illusions. Some aspects of his ideas on socialism in the forties and early fifties were tinged with European social-democratic and nationalist conceptions. He was influenced by George Padmore, an authoritative figure in the pan-African movement in the forties, who became Nkrumah's advisor after the declaration of Ghana's independence. Padmore's falsely formulated dilemma—pan-Africanism or communism—was not repudiated by Nkrumah at that time.

As President of Ghana, Nkrumah passed through a rough stage during which he was strongly influenced by national reformism with its illusions about the eternal harmony of national interests and its repudiation of class struggle in African society, etc.

Among the positive aspects of Nkrumah's subsequent evolution is the fact that he did not get stuck at that stage, where the convinced African national reformists, flirting with the Socialist International, have been for the last twenty or thirty years. This type of political position is again advocated by some renegades from the revolutionary wing of the anti-colonial movement. All their evolution amounts to is shifting the balance from the ideas of the exceptional, unique historical development of the African peoples to the typical conceptions of right-wing European social-democracy. This modification of African national reformism in the second half of the seventies is reflected in the work of Léopold Senghor, in the orientation towards the Socialist International and in the desire to consolidate their forces on a continental scale by creating a so-called Confederation of African Socialist Parties. There can hardly be any doubt that this type of evolution is linked, directly or indirectly, with the growing influence of neo-colonialism.

At the end of the fifties, various ideological and political trends began to precipitate out of the eclectic ideology of African nationalism, which combined, as the Fifth Pan-African Congress showed, revolutionary and reformist tendencies. Right-wing nationalists firmly took up bourgeois reformist positions, applying these reformist ideas not only to domestic but also to foreign policies, often resorting to collaboration with the imperialist powers. The left wing turned to the idea of non-capitalist development and worked out policies and ideological principles of national democracy. Nkrumah was one of the initiators and best representatives of the latter movement, which sought to strengthen the revolutionary potential and deepen the social content of the national liberation struggle. He came to the Marxist conclusion that both the socialist orientation and the consolidation

of true national independence in the economic and political spheres demanded the continuation of the consistent struggle against imperialist exploitation and the curbing of the egoistic aspirations of bourgeois elements. It was in this way that he gradually overcame the national reformist hostility towards the theory and practice of scientific socialism. And it was with Nkrumah that the national liberation movement in Africa began to grow closer to the socialist countries and that the ideas of Marxism-Leninism actively affected its ideology. These processes in Tropical Africa were most vividly embodied in the policies of the Republic of Ghana under Nkrumah and in his theoretical works.

At a time when the national reformists urged for conflicts with the former colonial powers to be forgotten, Nkrumah insisted on the need to maintain vigilance in the face of imperialist intrigues and to unite all revolutionary forces to oppose them. This goal was served by his ardent agitation in favour of African unity. Here, however, Nkrumah was prone to exaggeration. He saw all regional unions as a threat to broader unification and strove for the immediate formation of a continental government and army, forgetting that the necessary conditions did not exist for this, that extra—and large—obstacles were created by the deepening disparities in African political trends and by the diverse social orientation of the emergent states. But Nkrumah did undoubtedly play an outstanding role in the creation of the Organisation of African Unity, and was guided in his aspiration for African unity by his awareness of the need to unite the political, economic and military resources of the African countries to repulse the still grave threat posed by imperialism. He was convinced of this by the tragedy of the Congo.

Nkrumah spoke tirelessly of the great danger of imperialism and revealed new forms of imperialist expansion and oppression. This is dealt with, for example, in his book *Neo-Colonialism—The Last Stage of Imperialism*, published in London in 1965, in which he analysed such neo-colonialist methods as the imposition of 'defence' treaties and the building of military bases, the support of puppet governments, economic control in the form of aid and loans, unequal trade and the smothering of local economies by international corporations, penetration into the social environment through the indigenous bourgeoisie, and ideological propaganda. Nkrumah's book is still topical today.

The recognition of the class struggle was the most important and fundamental, qualitatively new ideological and political achievement of Nkrumah, and of national democrats in general, in the analysis of the internal situation in African countries. It was Nkrumah's book *Consciencism* which best expressed the general, tentative, more political than socio-economic approach to class contradictions in African society, which was typical of the whole of the national democratic movement at the first stage of its development. In this book, Nkrumah spoke of the conflict between 'positive action' and 'negative

forces', i.e., of the struggle of the forces of progress to establish social justice, abolish oligarchic exploitation and suppress the forces of reaction trying to prolong their colonial rule. Nkrumah took into account the conditional nature of this division. He foresaw the possibility of divisions within the positive revolutionary process and of some of its forces going over to the side of reaction.¹

Undoubtedly, this way of looking at things does not yet betray a Marxist understanding of social classes or a scientific analysis of the socio-economic and political structure of society. But it does contain a kind of basis for the objectively necessary tactics of a united anti-imperialist front, which, while not rising to a Marxist understanding of the issue, does not fundamentally contradict it. This position may, in the course of the struggle and with the accumulation of experience, take on Marxist content. True, in his *Consciencism*, Nkrumah called on the progressive forces ('positive action') to anticipate disintegration at its seminal stage and 'discover a way of containing the future schismatic tendencies'.² It is hard to say what is greater in this proposal: the desire to preserve by all means the union of progressive forces, or the illusory hope of quelling the class struggle—a hope sometimes expressed by Nkrumah, as is evidenced by certain publications in the Ghanaian newspaper *The Spark*, which reflect his contradictory evolution.

The publication of *Consciencism* was seen by official Ghanaian propaganda as the culmination of the 'theory of Nkrumahism'. The strong influence on this theory of the ideas of scientific socialism was obvious. It was seen in the recognition of general laws governing historical development, in the clear influence of Marxist dialectical materialism, and in Nkrumah's understanding of imperialism. As early as 1963, Fenner Brockway spoke of Nkrumah as a representative of 'African Marxism'. Nonetheless, in the early sixties, Nkrumah felt it necessary to voice his disagreements with Marxism on certain philosophical issues. But, as Engels said, 'to the crude conditions of capitalistic production and the crude class conditions corresponded crude theories'.³

Though considering Nkrumahism a materialist philosophy, the Ghanaian press underlined that it was not atheistic. While recognising in principle the law-governed nature of revolution, Nkrumah supposed that the preservation of traditional conditions in Africa allowed socialism to be attained by evolutionary means. *The Spark* characterised the identification of Nkrumahism with Marxism as an attack on Nkrumahism from the right, meaning that it would lead in Ghana to the awakening of those who, under the influence of imperialist propaganda, considered communism as brigandage and immorality.⁴

¹ See Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, Heinemann, London, 1964, pp. 104-105.

² *Ibid.*

³ Frederick Engels, 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific', in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 119.

⁴ *The Spark*, March 5, 1963.

Thus, basically tactical and not entirely unfounded considerations were put forward for drawing a line between Marxism and Nkrumahism.

Of course, it would be wrong to identify the two also from the point of view of scientific objectivity. Nkrumahism did not overcome reformist and nationalist ideas. But it did undoubtedly move towards Marxism rather than away from it. Moreover, there were no basic contradictions in the philosophies in their recognition of the possibility of successful non-capitalist development and of a united front of anti-imperialist forces on this basis, though they understood these phenomena differently. The constant evolution of Nkrumahism gave hope for its further rapprochement with scientific socialism on the basis of the gradual deepening of socialist trends in the framework of non-capitalist development. Such a rapprochement did come about. Several issues of *The Spark*, around which were grouped representatives of 'left Nkrumahism', and statements made by its editor-in-chief, Kofi Batsa, gave evidence of certain shifts in the concept of 'positive action', emphasising the special role of the working people in the alliance of progressive forces, pointing out the duality and contradictoriness of the views of national capitalists and their hostility towards socialist tendencies, and stressing the fundamental divergencies between Nkrumahism, characterised as scientific socialism in Africa, and national reformist 'African socialism'.

Nkrumahism was prevented from growing any closer to scientific socialism, however, by the reactionary coup in Ghana in February 1966, which led to the fall of Nkrumah's government. This major political defeat, which interrupted the non-capitalist development of the country, was bound to force Nkrumah to take fresh stock of things. He gradually came to the realisation that the counter-revolutionary coup could not have happened with such ease and success, had it not been for the mistakes committed by the leadership. His reconsideration of the past was made difficult by the demoralisation felt by the supporters of a socialist course and by their being uprooted from their native soil. In his many years of rule, the people got used to his personality cult, and he himself got used to governing single-handed and to settling issues by decree. Because of this, even afterwards, Nkrumah was unable to make an objective analysis of the economic, social and political situation in Ghana or of his own misjudgements, or to outline ways of organising and mobilising the country's revolutionary forces. In exile, Nkrumah wrote several books, two of which—*Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (1969) and *Class Struggle in Africa* (1970)—are of considerable interest in the context of the history of African socio-political thought. But he failed to write a book about the reasons for his own defeat, about the weaknesses and contradictions of the progressive regime in Ghana. He apparently lacked the courage to take an objective, fearless look at his own mistakes.

Nkrumah preferred the easier way out—an abstract, theoretical

review of strategies and tactics. The abstract nature of his considerations was clearly seen in the fact that after the reactionary coup in Ghana, he dreamt of revolution not in his own country but on a continental scale, and addressed his new ideological and political platform to the whole of Africa, from north to south, and from east to west.

The defeat of the revolutionary forces in Ghana could have led to their concentrating on a comparatively limited battlefront, to their stressing relatively modest immediate goals capable of gathering the remnants of the shattered forces and gradually preparing them for a fresh struggle. Having been defeated on the path of non-capitalist development in Ghana, however, Nkrumah began to speak of socialist revolution in the whole of Africa. It became apparent that he had to a large extent lost touch with reality. This was a paradoxical reaction to bitter defeat, certainly linked with his utopian socio-political ideas and his overestimation of the role of his own personality.

No one could doubt that the coup in Ghana testified to the social, economic and political troubles in the country. This was felt by Nkrumah too. He was also right in his tacit recognition of a certain ambiguity, incompleteness and contradictoriness in the ideological and political platform of Nkrumahism during the period of his rule. But unfortunately, as has been already said, Nkrumah did not choose to make a thorough critical analysis of the socio-political and economic development of Ghana in the first years of independence, of the development of the state apparatus and party, or of the alignment of classes in the country or of the position of the army. He did not notice the growth of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and did not wish to see the general corruption in the country.

Had he undertaken such an analysis, he would have seen many of the negative aspects of Ghana's internal development resulting not so much from strategic aims as from the real, acute contradictions between intentions and actions. He would have realised that the country's economy was marked by disproportions and that the desire for immediate maximum industrialisation and the realisation of major projects neither accorded with the state of the country's economy nor satisfied its most urgent requirements. He would have also understood that the desire for socialism was not preventing the intensive growth of capitalist tendencies, that the popular masses had gained little from the new power, least of all a rise in the standard of living, that the state apparatus was divorced from them and had become a means of personal, and in essence primitive, accumulation of capital. He would have seen that the Convention People's Party was not broadening or strengthening, but was losing its ties with the masses which had brought it to power, that the genuine revolutionary enthusiasm of the period of the struggle for independence had given way to ponderous official pomposity and to impetuous eulogies to the 'osagyefo', the leader and teacher, and that all this testified to the degeneration of power and its isolation from the people.

Though undoubtedly an intelligent man and experienced politician,

Nkrumah missed all this. He limited himself to pointing out the undermining activities of imperialism and internal reaction, the heterogeneous class composition of society as a result of the mixed economy, and the readiness of certain groups of officers in the armed forces, civil servants and police to work for the reactionaries. All this he saw when he was in power. What is more, he was frequently told this by Marxist-Leninists. Messages to Nkrumah from leaders of the socialist states constantly pointed to these unfavourable processes within the country, but to no avail. Nkrumah did not realise the danger threatening him when he was in power, and he did not grasp the whole diversity of reasons which caused his defeat, after he had lost power.

After his defeat, Nkrumah's theoretical and methodological judgments became more mature. He took, as it were, a new step towards scientific socialism. Now he asserted that 'there is only one true socialism and that is scientific socialism, the principles of which are abiding and universal'.¹ His illusions about quelling the class struggle were belatedly replaced by the clear statement: 'Socialism can only be achieved through class struggle.'² His general argumentation about the political blocs of progressive and reactionary forces ('positive action' and 'negative forces') gave way to a concrete analysis of the structure of African society, based on the position of different social strata in the production process and their division into privileged and oppressed.

All these positive changes in Nkrumah's views could have taken place much earlier, before his defeat, for they were quite compatible with his political course in the first half of the sixties. They could have promoted greater consistency in his socialist tendencies. But in the Nkrumah of the late sixties and early seventies, who had suffered a great shock, they went hand in hand with a full, and perhaps sometimes too radical, review of his old course. He began with the declaration of armed struggle as the only method of bringing about the aims of the liberation movement. All Nkrumah's works from 1967 onwards speak of the approach of a new, decisive phase in the revolution, whose distinctive feature would be armed struggle against the forces of reaction.

It is characteristic that Nkrumah suggested revolutionary war not only as a means of gaining independence—which was justified in a way at the time, for the liberation movement in the Portuguese colonies and in Southern Africa had taken precisely that course—but also as a means of fighting neo-colonialism and reaction. Despite the extreme diversity of conditions and tasks of the democratic, revolutionary movement in various countries and parts of Africa, Nkrumah recom-

¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare. A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution*, Panaf Books Limited, London, 1968, p. 29.

² Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 84.

mended all to use his universal method—armed struggle, which was an exaggeration of the role of armed struggle, its fetishisation, and a reaction to his own defeat as a result of underrating the role of the class struggle in Ghana. Towards the end of his life, he understood its role, but then perceived it principally in one form—armed struggle—and applied it to the whole of the African continent, irrespective of the concrete historical situation and actual conditions.

This 'unification' of Africa reflected one aspect of Nkrumah's desires—to create a pan-African government—for it was not only of a methodological, but also of an organisational character. Nkrumah advocated the creation of a unified African revolutionary army and party, seeing in them a power capable of bringing about the national and social liberation of the African peoples. This aim was, and still is, quite unrealistic, ignoring completely both the total absence of the conditions for such an organisation and the essential heterogeneity of the African revolutionary movements as regards their tasks and class and political nature. Moreover, it was a harmful aim, for it came close to denying the independent importance of the struggle waged within national frontiers. It still remains a misguided aim.

Nkrumah also unified the goals of the revolutionary movement in Africa. In his *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*, he spoke of three interrelated objectives—nationalism, pan-Africanism and socialism—underlining that none of these objectives could be achieved fully without the others.¹ Here Nkrumah was let down by his sense of national specific features, which bring one main aim to the forefront in each country, and by his sense of history. Contradictory elements—nationalism and socialism—are brought together; there is no convincing evidence of the stages of the revolutionary process. In his last book, *Class Struggle in Africa*, Nkrumah somewhat changed his definition of the objectives of the movement and removed logical contradictions. At the same time he took a new step in working out a revolutionary platform. He replaced 'nationalism' by the 'achievement of genuine national independence', which was certainly correct from the point of view of a class-based approach to the national liberation movement, and declared that true independence and pan-Africanism were only possible on the basis of socialism²—which could also be welcomed. But the evident growth of Nkrumah's subjective socialist ideas led him to declare socialism the immediate task of the liberation movement in Africa today.

This was followed by a complete review of strategy, again not on the basis of a scientific analysis of reality, but by getting rid of the logical mistakes contained in the *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*. Nkrumah offered the African liberation movement a strategy of socialist revolution. He declared that 'it is only peasantry and proletariat working together who are wholly able to subscribe to policies of

¹ See Kwame Nkrumah, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*, p. 24.

² See Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*, p. 84.

all-out socialism'.¹ But this basically true declaration led him to reject the tactics of a united anti-imperialist front, although he had supported it before, in the *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*. He called the whole of the African bourgeoisie a counter-revolutionary force which had finally joined up with international monopoly capital, and opposed union not only with it but also with petty-bourgeois circles at the current stage of the liberation movement.

Thus culminated the book version of his voluntarist programme of leftist radicalism, begun in 1967 with the enunciation of armed struggle as the sole means of struggle.

The profound contradictoriness of Nkrumah's ideological development after 1966 is self-evident. On the one hand, there was his noble intolerance of reformism and of the egoistic policies of national capital, his belief in socialism, and his assimilation of many theoretical principles of Marxism-Leninism; on the other, there was his inability to apply these principles to reality, which led him to hold views which basically coincided with many of the trends of petty-bourgeois radicalism in Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America. The very instability of Nkrumah's views, and his sudden transitions from reformist illusions to extreme radicalism, also testify to his affinity with these trends. Nationalist views were also present in the platform which Nkrumah considered consistently socialist.

But these errors should not obscure the main achievement of his life. Having covered the complex path of a progressive revolutionary nationalist, Nkrumah came to the conclusion that only scientific socialism was capable of guaranteeing freedom, prosperity and social justice for the peoples of Africa. He played an important part in spreading the ideas of socialism in Africa, and was one of the first leaders of the liberation movement on that continent to appeal to his people to be guided by the principles of scientific socialism and create a vanguard party of working people. Nkrumah never consciously opposed his own understanding of socialism to the Marxist-Leninist interpretation—and this sets him apart from most representatives of contemporary leftist radicalism. In spite of the inaccuracy of his understanding of socialism and of the ways to bring it about, his views were an important step forward in the development of ideas of liberation in the African continent.

Nkrumah often changed his views and repudiated his past mistakes. Death prevented him from correcting his last theoretical works. To review them critically is the task of the African revolutionary movement. It is to Nkrumah's credit that African revolutionaries can to some extent be considered his successors: they arm themselves with all the best aspects of his theoretical and political experience; they continue the process of convergence with scientific socialism, not confusing it with the pseudo-revolutionary platforms of petty-bourgeois radicals.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.