On the occasion of the launching of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s book Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-colonisation the cream of African and other intellectuals gather at the University of Ghana. In front of them stand Professor Willie E. Abraham of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ghana, and other great thinkers in the persons of Habib Niang (Senegal), Massaga Woungly (Cameroun), Bankole Akpata (Nigeria), H.M. Basner (South Africa) and S.G. Ikoku (Nigeria) who deliver separate speeches on the book.

The various speeches have one thing in common: Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s application of Marxism to African society. On the part of Prof. Abraham, he states that ‘Kwame Nkrumah said several years ago that he was a Marxist. By this he means that certain ideas of Marx are relevant to the African situation, and if applied will in his own words, ensure for us “a harmonious growth” and such “transformations upon nature as will develop our environment for our better fulfilment”. These ideas have been embraced by him to serve as “an instrument of national emancipation and integrity”.

Bankole Akpata puts it this way: ‘The task of philosophers has always been to enrich the understanding and to generalise its conclusions. This is precisely what Kwame Nkrumah has done in his Philosophical Consciencism. The measure of his great achievement is the extent to which he has succeeded in expressing the philosophical generalisations of past historical epochs with his own philosophical beliefs, with the totality of the social, political and scientific knowledge now available.

In this sense, Kwame Nkrumah’s is a unique and original contribution to philosophy in general and to a new development of Marxism in particular … Philosophical Consciencism is thus a new and creative development of Marxism in African conditions and experience. Both in belief and in action a Marxist is a humanist; he lives by human values achieved through human action.’ We publish here Bankole Akpata’s speech. In the next series, S. G. Ikoku’s speech, to the same effect, is published.
PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIENTISM

By

KWAME NKRUMAH

A new development of Marxism in the era of the collapse of imperialism and colonialism in Africa

By

BANKOLE AKPATA

I

The publication of Consciencism at this period in our history is of immense and epoch-making significance not only for Africa, but for the whole world. A philosophical work of great magnitude and depth has been unfolded to us.

Ideology plays a very significant role in social life and in the history of society. Arising as a reflection of the conditions of the material life of society, ideology exercises, on its own part, an active influence on society.

Hence Consciencism has been correctly described as the philosophy and ideology for de-colonization and development with particular reference to the African Revolution.

II

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin on the eve of the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution was compelled to re-state and defend the philosophy of Marxism, i.e. dialectical materialism, against the attempts of some Russian intellectuals who falsely claimed that they had revised and perfected Marxism.

The result was, of course, Lenin’s great philosophical work Materialism and Empirio-Criticism published in 1908. Lenin’s philosophical work was not merely a restatement and defence of Marxism, but was a further development of the theoretical and ideological weapon with which Lenin armed the Russian workers, peasants and progressive intellectuals to assail and overthrow oppressive Tsarism and establish the people’s power.

This was at the period of the 1st World War (1914-1918) when the system of imperialism was first breached, and the first Socialist state in the world – the U.S.S.R. – emerged on the world scene. Though I have spoken of Lenin, this has only been to illustrate how in the concrete situation of the nationalist struggle a leader has to think through principles afresh and develop them to meet the needs of his particular country and people.

Kwame Nkrumah does not take his beginning from Leninism but from a survey of philosophy.
Kwame Nkrumah with his Philosophical Consciencism has performed a task, monumental in its scope, for the African Revolution and the world in the second half of the 20th century, the period of the collapse of imperialism and colonialism in Africa.

Philosophy is the attempt to understand the nature of the world and our place and destiny in it.

The task of philosophers has always been to enrich the understanding and to generalise its conclusions.

This is precisely what Kwame Nkrumah has done in his Philosophical Consciencism. The measure of his great achievement is the extent to which he has succeeded in expressing the philosophical generalisations of past historical epochs with his own philosophical beliefs, with the totality of the social, political and scientific knowledge now available. In this sense, Kwame Nkrumah’s is a unique and original contribution to philosophy in general and to a new development of Marxism in particular.

In the words of the author himself

“Our Society is not the old society, but a new society enlarged by Islamic and Euro-Christian influences. A new emergent ideology is, therefore, required, an ideology which can solidify in a philosophical statement, but at the same time an ideology which will not abandon the original humanist principles of Africa. Such a philosophical statement will be born out of the crisis of the African Conscience confronted with the three strands of present African Society.

Such a philosophical statement I propose to name Philosophical Consciencism, for it will give the theoretical basis for an ideology whose aim shall be to contain the African experience of the traditional African Society, and, by gestation, employ them for the harmonious growth and development of that society.” (p. 70).

Philosophical Consciencism is thus a new and creative development of Marxism in African conditions and experience. Both in belief and in action a Marxist is a humanist, he lives by human values achieved through human action.

This humanism, as Kwame Nkrumah expounds in minute detail and with such clarity and lucidity, is consistent with the traditional African way of life. The respect for human individuality and human capacity finds its logical basis in the understanding of society and its transformations given us by Marxism, and today reaffirmed anew and developed to a higher level for us by philosophical conscientism.

The fundamental task of philosophy is to discover and generalise the laws of change and development manifested in nature and society. These most general laws, the laws of
dialectics, provide the theoretical weapon, the method for understanding and changing society.

VI

In our own African experience and environment philosophical consciencism is such a philosophy. It generalises the laws of change and development in Africa not only from the discoveries of science and Marxism, but from the whole complex of the movement of African Society in its entirety.

This means concretely that philosophical consciencism not only generalises the laws of change and development in Africa, but provides us with the theoretical and intellectual means for understanding the forces at work in our society, and what is more, how to organise and harness those forces (1) for the total liberation of Africa from imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism (2) for the intensification of the struggle for real and effective African Unity and (3) for the building of Socialism in Africa.

The problem, therefore, of interpreting African Society, has become the problem of how to change our society with the philosophy and ideology of Philosophical consciencism as our intellectual guide.

VII

As in France at the end of the 18th century, when materialism fought and won against every kind of medieval rubbish, against feudalism in institutions and ideas; as Leninism became the revolutionary theoretical weapon with which the working people of the Socialist half of the world fought and defeated capitalism after the 2nd World War, a period of the general crisis of imperialism, so in the second half of the 20th century, Kwame Nkrumah’s philosophical consciencism will prove to be the only consistent philosophy and ideology of the African revolution, true to all the teachings and discoveries of natural science and Marxism. Philosophical consciencism is the theoretical weapon with which the aroused masses of the African people will unite and smash the beleaguered ramparts of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

BANKOLE AKPATA

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