

FOREWORD TO 2ND EDITION

THE YEARLONG CELEBRATION OF GHANA'S GOLDEN JUBILEE provides a fitting context for the republication of the book *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy*. In the lead-up to the celebration and over the course of the year, the life and times of Kwame Nkrumah will receive unprecedented public attention, official and unofficial. Kwame Nkrumah's very wide name-recognition is, paradoxically, accompanied by sketchy, often oversimplified knowledge about the events and processes of his life and times. For most of those born after independence in 1957, such knowledge does not extend much beyond who Kwame Nkrumah was and vague notions about "he won us Independence". Among the older ones, who have some personal experience of the period, strong views are held, for or against Nkrumah and his role in Ghana's history. What is not in dispute is the iconic status that he occupies, even among those who hold negative views about him. Thus, while all agreed on the legendary and iconic status of Nkrumah in Ghana's history, the public discourse also reflects the views of a minority, that is quite anxious "to balance the picture" by emphasising what it considers the negative features of both Nkrumah and of the period.

Against this background of oversimplification, tending towards both deification and demonisation, the appearance of a book that sets out the record on the basis of sound research and objective comment, should contribute significantly to the quality of the academic and public debate. This book presents new material

and new analysis, which helps to clarify aspects of the record, while advancing new perspectives. What comes across clearly throughout the book is the significant contribution of Nkrumah's vision and personality at a critical moment in the history of Africa and the Third World. He, perhaps more than any other, was able to identify, focus and catalyse the major factors and players driving the struggle for political independence in Ghana and liberation in other parts of Africa. In the process, he committed his life and work totally to a wide variety of activities and processes in Ghana, the continent and in the global Non-Aligned Movement.

Clearly demonstrated throughout the book was Nkrumah's insistence that the fight for independence went beyond anti-colonialism, involving, as it did, an uncompromising quest for autonomous and self-sustaining national development. This was to be attained through the transformation of a largely agrarian society and economy into one with the requisite political and social structures, and sufficient industry and scientification to assure dignified and adequate living conditions for all the peoples – goals attainable, in his view, only within the context of a united and independent Africa. This reflected a particular ideology and a sophisticated grasp of the social, economic and cultural preconditions for attaining the vision. Yet Nkrumah was no idle visionary. Not for him the passive acceptance of “global forces” as an excuse for abdicating policy to the “the market”, as if the market itself were not a social construct. The record shows a person of ideas, working ceaselessly, through political activity, economic planning, and continental and international diplomacy in the prosecution of a national and continental vision. The principal components of that vision could be summarised as:

- *national unity*, rejecting the centrifugal forces generated by regional, ethnic and other particularisms;
- a steadfast focus on *economic transformation*, not simply

growth or development, such as would result in the autonomous development of society and the economy;

- and in pursuit of these, the *total liberation and unity of Africa* and its *non-alignment* in the Cold War between the super power blocs.

Without dwelling on the details of the life and times of Kwame Nkrumah as carefully set out in the book, one comes away with a sense of an epochal period, during which much was dreamt and attempted, and much achieved – from social and infrastructural development within Ghana; the consolidation of a *national* identity and sense of self-worth; the inspiration and active support of liberation movements throughout Africa and the promotion of continental unity; to the successful championing of non-alignment. At the same time, considering the impossible range of necessary engagements required by the situation, it is not surprising that Nkrumah and his colleagues were grievously over-stretched. This comes across clearly in Rooney’s account, with very serious consequences for regime effectiveness and regime sustainability. As noted in the Introduction [to the first edition],

“... Nkrumah will be seen as a man of vision whose achievements were undermined by the inadequacy of his administration. . . He produced the new ideology and attempted to implement it – a task too big for any one man.”

In emphasising the serious flaws of the regime, Rooney makes particular mention of Nkrumah’s failure to deal decisively with his followers and to make difficult and unpopular decisions. This was especially evident in the failure to address the question of corruption and the abuse of state power, particularly in relation to detention without trial.

Fifty years on, what marks Kwame Nkrumah out were the

power and loftiness of his vision, and the single-mindedness with which he pursued it. To most people, the principal question is less whether the vision was attained or attainable under the conditions of the 1950s and 1960s; nor, even, whether it was pursued consistently and effectively. It is more whether that vision, or elements of it, continues to be relevant in our present circumstances, and what lessons are to be learnt from the successes and failures of the time.

Akilagba Sawyerr

Association of African Universities

Accra, Ghana

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